



REBECCA.

56.

KDm

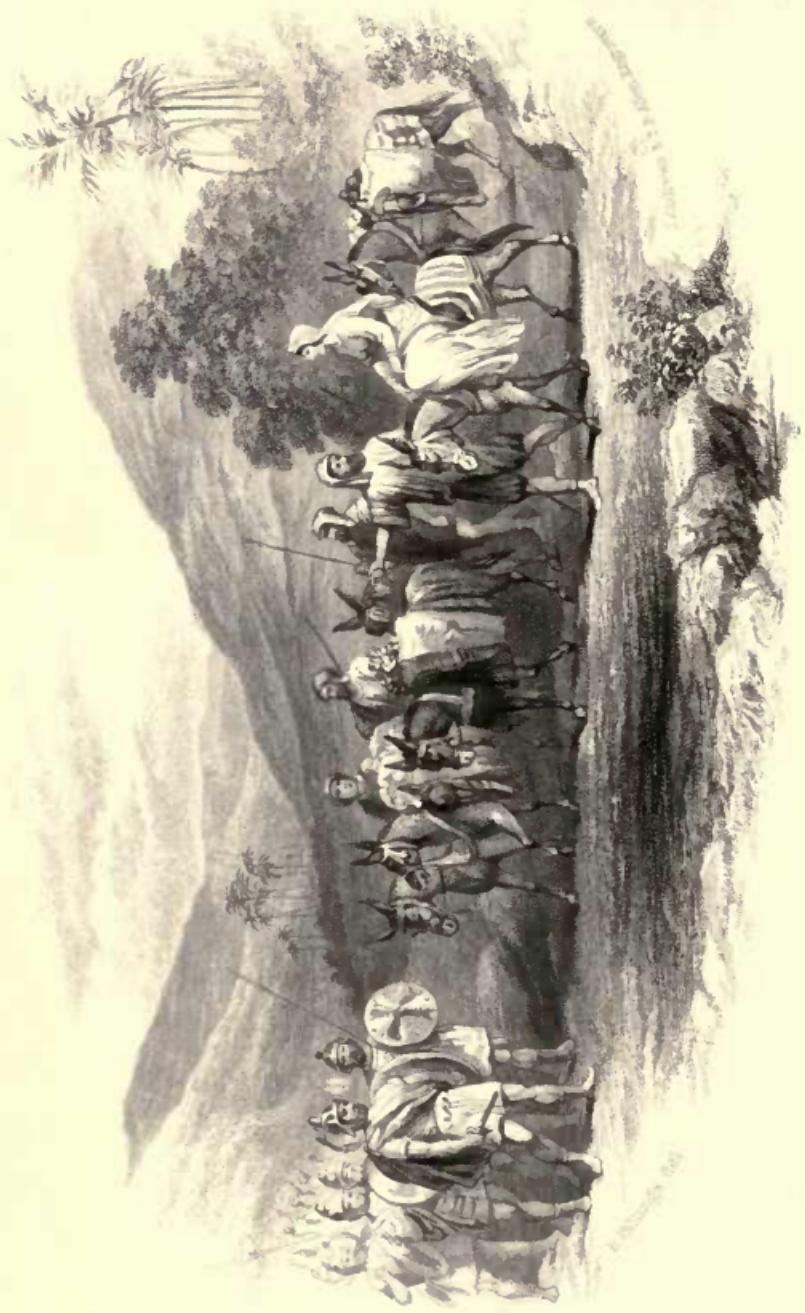
1568.

Phoebe Hayes.
Farmington N.H.









The meeting of King Saul and David

THE

MOTHERS OF THE BIBLE.

BY

MRS. S. G. ASHTON.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY

REV. A. L. STONE.

"ALL SCRIPTURE IS PROFITABLE."

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY JOHN P. JEWETT AND COMPANY.

CLEVELAND, OHIO:

JEWETT, PROCTOR & WORTHINGTON.

NEW YORK:

SHELDON, LAMPORT & BLAKEMAN.

1855.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1854, by
JOHN P. JEWETT & Co.,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

C A M B R I D G E :
ALLEN AND FARNHAM, PRINTERS.

Stereotyped by
HOBART & ROBBINS,
New England Type and Stereotype Foundery,
BOSTON.

"THE HEART THAT

WE HAVE LAIN NEAR BEFORE OUR BIRTH IS THE ONLY ONE THAT
CAN NEVER FORGET THAT IT HAS LOVED US."

To

MY MOTHER,

AS A

SLIGHT TOKEN OF THE ESTIMATION IN WHICH I HOLD HER
UNFORGETTING LOVE,

This Volume

IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED.

2051016



INTRODUCTION.

BY REV. A. L. STONE.

Two immediate objects seem to have influenced the author of the following pages, in preparing them for the press: one, to prompt her readers to a diligent and careful study of the Bible; the other, to quicken, in those who sustain the maternal relation, a sense of their responsibility, and to inspire them with a more prayerful devotion to their solemn trust. The book itself is the offspring of this double parentage,—the habit of the daily study of the Scriptures, and the pressure of a mother's duty. The richest recompense it can bring to the writer will be the knowledge that it has led other minds, trembling and fainting under that pressure, to seek light and guidance, strength and hope, in the teachings of the Holy Ghost.

The wealth of the Scripture fulness in respect to any commanding interest of life is, except to the earnest and laborious student, a mine of unknown riches. The careless reader, in lightly skimming the surface, may catch the sheen of here and there a gem, the glimmer of golden dust; but the rarer jewels of truth, the deep-chambered veining of the precious ore, are to such eyes hidden treasures. The thoughts of God, by which he would make us, the pupils of his tuition, wise unto salvation, are not in their clear but profound depths so easily fathomed. Shutting up all this lore of spiritual things in one volume, our divine Teacher has meant us to search and master that one book with a patience and thoroughness of

acquisition beyond those of all other scholarship. If this book were a systematic treatise upon the topics comprehended within its broad horizon, like a volume of theological essays, the demand for this steady and keen-eyed investigation were possibly not so urgent. But the truths it contains are scattered along its pages, in seeming disorder and disconnection. Here stands a sublime doctrine; next comes an impassioned song; next, a prophet's vision of the far future; then a page of history, or a chapter of biography, and then some earnest exhortation. The sweet voices of the bards, the seer's mystic utterances, the confused shouts of the warriors, fall upon our ear in the same wave of sound. The Saviour himself taught no body of divinity in philosophic form. He spake and wrought as occasion prompted. The scenes of his wanderings, the insulting question of some haughty scribe, the petition of some poor sufferer for healing, or the death of one he loved, were the texts upon which his lips distilled wisdom. So we look for one doctrine in Galilee, for another at the well of Sychar, and for another in the desert. Out of the utterances of four thousand years we have to gather up the sublime whole of revelation.

It is not strange, therefore, that we are commanded, by that word of intense significance, to **SEARCH** the Scriptures. This is, not to sit carelessly down, in the hurrying morning, and fling open a leaf anywhere, and glance the eye at speed along the lines of a short chapter, or the half of a long one. It is not to hang at late evening, with heavy eyelids, over a brief Psalm, satisfied that we have thus honored the word of God.

“**SEARCH**,” as the gold-hunter for the glittering scales he covets; as the shepherd of the fold for a lamb straying in the wilderness; as the woman of the parable for her lost piece of silver. We are to **STUDY** the Scriptures, portion by

portion, patiently, intently, with commentaries and Bible dictionaries, and cyclopedias, and whatsoever *helps* we can command ; and, first of all, and most of all, with wrestling prayer for divine illumination, as scholars of the Spirit.

It will be one of the happiest influences of these sketches, as it has been their chief inspiration, if they awaken in any soul a new relish for the Book of books, and a fresh purpose to commune more intimately with its celestial voices.

And for none were such an influence more precious and blessed, than for one sustaining the tender relation, and charged with the solemn responsibility, of A MOTHER. As the joy of maternity is hers ; as she bears and nurtures the new life waking to a deathless being ; as its first pulses of vitality and consciousness beat next to her heart, and beneath her eye ; as none can come, in the tenderness and closeness of this natural tie, between her and her child ; so the earliest, nearest, and most determinate forces that mould the character of that young aspirant for immortality, are those she wields. They are shed silently as dews of night. Their author may be altogether unconscious, and purposeless in their administration. But none the less are they potent and controlling. The first sights those wondering eyes open upon, the first sounds that fall upon the ear, all the surroundings of the cradle and the nursery, leave images of themselves on that young brain never to be effaced, and shaping the first rudimental elements of character.

How many unwritten histories, one day to be published, keep within their hidden volumes the memorial of these infinitesimal and subtle influences that have the first access to the heart, and inweave themselves with its earliest sentiments and passions !

How needful that a relation, so linked with human destinies here and hereafter, should be instructed and furnished out of

the Divine Manual!—that all which is warning and all which is consoling in the historic examples which it records of such a relation, should press with its hopes and fears the maternal heart! What other light shines so clear to guide?—what other wisdom can give safe responses when this momentous question exercises that heart? “*For what end, and by what principles and methods, shall I train my child?*”

To awaken this question with unthinking spirits; to enter with quiet and large sympathies into the solicitudes of every Christian mother; to gather into one picture gallery, from the wide ranges and scattered sketches of inspiration, the portraits of those in the elder ages who wrought blessing or cursing in this one relation; to lead all, who may gaze with interest upon the faint copies, to seek for themselves the presence of the originals, and so to help the sanctification of the homes of our land, is the mission on which this little volume is sent forth.

With what simple beauty and pathos, with what careful fidelity to sacred history, and with what diligence of investigation, the author has accomplished her task, we may confidently leave her readers to testify.

“HILLSIDE,” ROXBURY, }
OCTOBER, 1854. }

CONTENTS.

THE BIBLE,	5
THE MOTHERS OF THE BIBLE,	8
EVE,	11
OTHER ANTEDILUVIAN MOTHERS,	22
SARAH AND HAGAR,	31
THE WIFE OF LOT,	60
REBEKAH,	65
LEAH AND RACHEL,	90
JOCHEBED,	102
THE MOTHERS OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT,	110
ZIPPORAH,	120
THE MOTHERS OF ISRAEL AT HOREB,	129
THE WIDOWED MOTHERS OF ISRAEL AT HOREB,	137
NAOMI AND RUTH,	146
HANNAH,	156
ICHABOD'S MOTHER,	169
THE MOTHER OF SAMSON,	177
RIZPAH,	188
BATHSHEBA,	200
ABIGAIL,	211

THE MOTHER OF REHOBOAM,	221
THE MOTHER OF ABIJAH,	233
JEZEBEL,	240
ATHALIAH,	248
THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH,	261
THE SHUNAMITE,	269
THE MOTHER OF JOB'S CHILDREN,	283
ELIZABETH,	290
MARY,	296
THE WIDOW OF NAIN,	311
THE SYROPHENICIAN MOTHER,	321
THE GRANDMOTHER AND MOTHER OF TIMOTHY,	328

THE
MOTHERS OF THE BIBLE.

THE BIBLE.

My Bible ! my precious, blessed Bible ! what were life without thee ? Guide of my otherwise wandering feet, solace of all my cares ! Only competent instructor of my ignorance — truest, safest counsellor in difficulty — most cheerful companion in hours of darkness ! Rich treasure-house, in which are stored the thoughts of my God, his purposes of mercy toward a ruined world ! Inexhaustible fountain of pure and sweet waters, from which I daily drink and am refreshed !

“ With thee conversing I forget all time.” My dull, earthly spirit, quickened by the spirit divine which illuminates thy pages, rises invigorated and gladdened from every fresh communion.

With thee, I witness, delighted, creating wonders. I see earth, robed in beauty, spring from chaos at the Almighty mandate, and listen to the song of the morning stars. I converse with the first parents of our race amid their Eden joys, and shed tears of pity over the bitter and dark reverse. With Noah and his liberated family I rejoice, as the long-absent sun lights the mountain-top, and from the sacred altar goes up the incense of gratitude to the God of winds and waves. I listen and admire while Abraham pleads, and Moses talks with God as a man talketh with his friend. For me the sweet psalmist of Israel pours forth rich strains of heavenly melody, and the prophet thunders the threatenings of Jehovah upon his backsliding people. I follow down the long track of ages with eager step, beholding on every side the wonders God hath wrought, and singing ever, as I go, “Praise ye the Lord! Praise him for his mighty acts! Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help!” Folded and laid aside as a garment by his powerful hand, I see the fading glories of the old dispensation give place to simpler, but more delightful and signifi-

cant ceremonies. Touched by his finger, I see Judea's pride, the joy of the whole earth, the city of her God, crumbling to dust ; and on its ruins, built by Almighty power, there rises an edifice in comparison of which the former shall not be mentioned nor come into mind.

But, O, most precious of all the joys thou hast in store for those that love thee is the record of His life and death who is the believer's portion, whom having not seen he loves, his refuge and hiding-place, the source of joy unspeakable to his soul. Here, indeed, I am fed with living bread. Again and again, with new wonder and love, I study the history of my Redeemer's earthly sojourn. With intense and absorbing interest I ponder on his mysterious birth, his wonderful childhood, the cares and labors of his most sorrowful life, and the mighty agonies of his atoning death.

There is no theme interesting to man of which thou canst not speak. Blest book of God ! Vain is it that I strive to show thy worth to me !

THE MOTHERS OF THE BIBLE.

WE propose, in the pages of this volume, to record the results of an earnest and diligent study of the Bible with reference to this particular topic, and to gather together, in as interesting a manner as we may, such instruction and encouragement as it will afford mothers in their important work.

Of all the mothers who have lived in our world, those who are mentioned in the Bible are the only ones of whom God has ever spoken. To millions upon millions he has given the care of children, and capabilities for their proper nurture. Many of them, doubtless, have been faithful mothers, whom he has blessed, whose prayers he has heard, whose children he has numbered among his jewels. But whether he has approved or censured we know not from his own mouth, and shall not know till the final day. Some have passed from earth; and some still live, but their record is not here. In the Bible, however, there

are the names of those concerning whom God has spoken. We do not know, until we give ourselves to the study, how many there are, nor how much is said of them. But, be it more or less, it will be deeply interesting and important. It will, perhaps, enable us to understand better how the heart of our heavenly Father is affected toward the mothers of the earth — with what feelings he regards them, as they toil on amid their cares and anxieties. It will bind us to him in new bonds. It will elevate our views. It will refine and purify our affections. It will make the relations we sustain appear more sacred and solemn in our eyes, as we shall see them taking hold on eternity. It will lead us to more earnest prayer — to more cheerful, hopeful efforts for the best welfare of our precious ones. It will endear to us the holy Scriptures, the invaluable communications of sovereign wisdom and love to us who are ignorant and erring. Let us cast aside the indifference which even Christians are prone to feel to this book of God, and come to the study of it as to a fresh fountain, and in the spirit of those who look eagerly for instruction to a wise and loved teacher.

To breathe thus a while, from time to time, the pure atmosphere of God's presence, will give us new spiritual health and vigor. To become acquainted with his thoughts and opinions will greatly enrich our minds and hearts, and furnish us a more correct standard than we can possibly gain from the world, by which to measure all relations, and duties, and promised gain.

We offer our earnest prayer, that he who inspired and dictated this volume will enable us to gain from it all the instruction which he intended it should convey.

EVE.

PERHAPS no character of earthly history, if we except only our Lord Jesus Christ, gathers about itself so much of interest, calls forth such deep and varying emotions, or affords such important instruction, as does that of our first mother ; certainly in no other do we find such marked contrasts, such strange vicissitudes. Hers was indeed a checkered life. It could hardly be compared, like ours, to an “April day ;” the clouds were too black and portentous, the sunshine too brilliant. Not on her path shone “a little sun,” nor dropped “a little rain.” The effulgence of heaven and the driving tempest were fitter types. To her lips was presented a draught of pure, unalloyed, and perfect happiness. For a few brief days she tasted bliss complete. But the cup from which she drank through lingering centuries contained dregs of bitterest woe. She listened, delighted, to the thrilling tones of nature’s harp, touched by Almighty skill,

and tuned to nicest harmony ; and on her ear grated the harsh and fearful discord, when the curious strings were shattered by her own disobedient hand. To her it was given to look upon life in its perfection, when the earth yielded her luxuriant fruits spontaneously ; when flowers of every hue and thornless roses blossomed about her path ; when animals of various names, obedient to man, and gentle in disposition, gambolled and frisked at her side, and there was none to molest or make afraid. And she gazed also, in sorrowful amaze, at the bitter contrast, when the ground, cursed for man's sake, brought forth thorns and thistles, and universal war raged among the tribes of the forest. She alone, of all her daughters, enjoyed in its completeness, unmarred and entire, true conjugal bliss. Fairest of them all in person, and most excellent in character, she was most worthy of the love which she received from her husband, such love as no son of Adam has since been able to bestow. But even on this domestic happiness she saw the blighting mildew fall, and her path of life thenceforth, even when trodden by her husband's side,

led often through dark, and wretched, and jarring scenes. Our mother Eve ! How has her name ever summoned the most conflicting emotions and thoughts, — approval and censure, admiration and contempt, blessing and cursing ! Around her poetry has thrown all its enchantments, portraying her beautiful and lovely beyond compare ; and on her devoted head have the maledictions of a race been showered, as on the most sinful of God's creation. The stern and truth-telling oracles of God, neither charmed by poetry nor swayed by prejudice, present her to us, in one hour exalted, dignified, and holy, the fit companion of man in his best estate, worthy the society of angels, and even of God himself ; in the next, fallen, weak and sinful, the victim of Satan's artful wiles, an object of pity to all holy beings, and the wretched subject of divine displeasure.

EVE AS A MOTHER.

We might follow the contrasts presented in Eve's history to any extent, or dwell upon the absorbing topics afforded by her state of primeval

innocence in Eden ; for it is there we best love to contemplate her. But our design leads us elsewhere. We wish to study her character as a mother ; to look upon her in relation to her own immediate family, and gather such lessons as we may from the “ brief memorial ” which the sacred writer has left on record concerning her. The picture is not a bright one. Guilt and fear have drawn the outline, and a violated law has hung the heavens with dark and threatening gloom. Yet it is not all dark. Despair has not been permitted to touch it with her death-dyed pencil. Hope shows here and there an opening in the clouds ; and Faith, best messenger from God to sinful men, has hung it where celestial rays stream brightly upon it, and insensibly draw the gazer’s thoughts upward to their source — to Him who in the midst of judgment still remembers mercy, and who would thus point erring creatures to a dwelling in his own abode of eternal light.

It is no longer Paradise, but an earthly home, upon which we look. It was, without doubt, a rude and simple habitation which Adam and Eve first tenanted. Perhaps it was provided, as was

their first clothing, by the immediate care of God. However this may be, it served for shelter and repose, and was to them a home. From this spot Adam went daily forth to earn by the sweat of his brow their needed subsistence, leaving Eve to her lighter but not less necessary toil. Here, day after day, she pursued her avocations, and communed with her own thoughts. Already had the dreaded curse commenced its work. Often sad and dispirited, weary, weak and suffering, filled with forebodings of the future, pressed by sore regret for the past, alarmed by unwonted distress in all her frame, she began to understand the meaning of those fearful words, "I will greatly multiply the sorrow of thy conception." Added to this, with her, doubtless, ever abode a deep feeling of sinfulness, a consciousness of innocence departed, a bitter remembrance of what she had been, and a humiliating sense of her altered character. The serenity of mind, the integrity of purpose, the purity of soul, were gone forever; and, worse than all, she knew, she felt, that her children would inherit, not her glory, but her sin and shame. Our deepest sympathies are

called forth as we behold her thus. But even then all was not darkness in her soul. The same voice that pronounced the curse had also promised deliverance from it, and that deliverance was to come to her as a mother. Expecting this, Eve probably looked forward to the birth of the first human child with such emotions as no mother has since experienced.

At length the day came. “She brought forth her first-born son.” We can imagine something of the joy and gratitude which followed her anguish, as with her husband she gazed upon the helpless being. A mother’s instincts taught her, all inexperienced and unaided as she was, to care for its wants and support its feebleness. How many exclamations of surprise and admiration and affection were bestowed on this first infant, we do not know. The theme of many an earnest conversation, an object of ever-increasing interest, we feel that his coming brought new happiness to the sad hearts of his parents, and was to them a proof that God, though justly displeased, was still their friend, even as in their sinless days. Only one expression from his mother’s lips is recorded,

but that reveals a hidden world of thought: "I have gotten a man from the Lord." Poor Eve! how many experiences of hope deferred were yet to be her portion! How bitter was to be her disappointment now! The Lord had promised that her seed should bruise the serpent's head, and she verily thought this had been he.

Time passed on, and she was the mother of another son; and we infer from the sacred narrative, though no direct mention is made of them, that daughters also graced this first human home. Here we wish for more light. We long for some account of that family circle. We can hardly rest satisfied to know so little on a subject which interests us so deeply. We can, indeed, imagine them a bright and happy group, and picture to ourselves their probable circumstances. But we have a thousand questions to ask, and especially concerning their mother's daily instructions and care. Exhaustless themes we know she had on which to dwell, and we are persuaded that she lost no opportunity of impressing the lessons which she had learned by bitter experience. We seem to see their animated looks as she described

the beauty and glory of her Eden home ; and the awe which would steal over their young faces, as with sorrowing heart she told them of the sin of their parents, and of Jehovah's displeasure, which banished them thence. We can deem that they were never weary of listening to the oft-told but ever-wonderful tale. We can understand, too, that Adam and Eve both regarded with intense anxiety the unfolding minds and hearts of their children. To any true mother the development of character in her child is a source of deepest solicitude. But how earnestly must Eve have watched from day to day the working of that deadly poison which her own folly had infused ! What joy must have been hers when she saw a disposition to love and obey their Maker in any of her little flock ! and we can well believe that, as she marked evil tempers and rebellious passions,

“ Her smitten conscience felt as sharp a pain
As if she fell from innocence again.”

Over these scenes of daily life — over her hopes and fears, her cares and sorrows — the veil

of oblivion has fallen. We ask in vain concerning them all. We shall never know, until we meet our first mother in heaven, what we would most wish to learn. Through long, long centuries her life was lengthened out. She saw her loved and gentle Abel all ghastly in death, murdered by him who at his birth was to her the promised of the Lord. She saw many sons and daughters around her, and their descendants for nearly a thousand years. She saw the earth filled with violence and wickedness, and beheld her own children debased by idolatry, and wilfully ignorant of the God whose presence she and her husband had so often welcomed as their chiefest joy, the crowning delight of Paradise. Bitter proofs of Satan's malignant influence she saw on every side ; but it was not permitted her to hail the Deliverer, for whom she still, without doubt, continued to look until her eyes were dim, and her form was bowed with age.

But the evening came to her, which sooner or later comes to all. The shadows of death fell upon her, and in some spot of earth she has a grave. When, or where, or how she died, we are

not told, nor whether she departed in peace. But we receive the impression, we scarcely know how, perhaps from her exclamation at the birth of Cain, that she died in the faith of a Redeemer. We feel, as we have said, that he was her life-long hope, and we expect to meet her in that higher and more delightful Paradise, whose joys have long since compensated her for the sorrows of earth.

We have but briefly and faintly shadowed forth some of the thoughts which suggest themselves as we study the history of Eve. One lesson we would gather, and our labor shall not then be vain. We would learn from her to estimate the true value of the favor of God. That favor she once enjoyed. In the eyes of the infinite Jehovah she was sinless and pure, and beneath his smile her days were passed. Bright days they were, of unmixed bliss. How wretched and heart-sick must she have been when the smile was withdrawn, and her disobedience had brought in its stead a frown of displeasure! We who have lived from our infancy in the cold atmosphere of a revolted world, amid griefs, and pains, and

death, and who ever look upon second causes, can understand little of the connection which Eve saw between transgression and its consequences. To her, the approbation of God was only another name for all her joy in Eden, and his displeasure was the immediate source of every sorrow she endured. Let us endeavor ourselves to appreciate this truth more fully than we have ever done, and teach it in all its extent to our children. “His favor is life ; his loving-kindness is better than life.”

OTHER ANTEDILUVIAN MOTHERS.

It may be deemed irrelevant to our subject, and perhaps useless, to dwell even for a moment on the antediluvian history of the world, or upon the period between the flood and the call of Abraham, since during that long period there is no history of the life of any mother, and scarcely is the name of one mentioned. Yet we know that the human race multiplied fast ; that there were thousands of mothers then living ; and we may possibly gather something of interest concerning them, if we study closely. Be this as it may, it is necessary that we gain some distinct and accurate knowledge of the condition and habits of men at that remote era, in order that we may more fully comprehend the character and mission of those mothers who will occupy our future attention.

The first mother mentioned after Eve is the wife of Cain. Little, indeed, is said of her ; we

do not even know her name; but we learn enough to enlist for her our sympathies, and induce our esteem. She was the daughter of Adam and Eve, the sister of Cain and Abel. Many years of her life were probably passed in the pleasant companionship of parents and brothers and sisters, and in comparative happiness. But a dark and bitter day came — a wretched day. Abel, the gentle and beloved, is murdered; and Cain, the son, the husband, the brother, the most important member of the little circle, is guilty of his blood, and henceforth a fugitive and wanderer, cursed of God, and feared by all who once loved him. He goes forth from home and friends, but he goes not alone. By his side is found the wife of his youth, self-exiled for his sake. A happy wife she is not — that were impossible ; but a faithful wife and true, since she leaves all that she holds dear besides, and clings to him. To the east of Eden they take their way, and commence their life anew in the land of Nod. But even upon Cain, the outcast and the murderer, there are shed the blessings and bounty of Heaven. In those far-distant days it could be said,

as now, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust." They were not long alone ; an infant is born, to cheer and hallow, with its helplessness and seeming innocence, their humble dwelling ; and the name they give it—Enoch, the consecrated—seems to indicate some repentance in the father's heart, some desire to return to the worship and love of God. Whether this be true or not, we learn from his name, and from the fact that a city was built in his honor, that he was a beloved child ; we catch some glimpse of the mother's joy and the father's pride ; we learn enough to link us, by the bond of human sympathy and kindred feeling, to that second of earth's mothers. We pity her sorrows ; we honor her for her faithful devotion to her husband ; we rejoice with her in the birth of her child. Two lines in the sacred volume contain all that is recorded of her, but they were not written in vain.

After the birth of Enoch, the sacred history proceeds rapidly. The descendants of Cain become numerous, and build cities, or hamlets, as

they might more properly be called ; they invent useful arts ; they cultivate the soil, and the blessings and evils incident to the communities of earth are found among them. After several generations, Adah and Zillah, wives of Lamech, are mentioned, and we are led to contemplate them as representatives of a class of which we, in these better days, know little. We cannot think of them pleasantly. We do not understand how they could share that most sacred of all treasures to a woman, her place in her husband's heart. We think they could not have been happy ; we are sure they must have had fearful temptations. In their family circle imagination almost fears to linger ; we look for scenes of discord, and we are sure that polygamy, though permitted, was never a part of the divine plan. And yet Adah and Zillah were mothers, and they had sons who were distinguished in their generation, and are remembered still as the inventors of useful and delightful arts ; and we can imagine the deep interest with which the efforts of industry and ingenuity were watched from day to day, and the approbation and joy which

crowned their success. There music first sent forth her harmonies ; there the first tent was spread ; there first instruments of brass and iron were used ; there, according to the ancient Rabbins, the wheel first hummed its monotonous tune under woman's busy hands ; and, as if to crown these family honors, the first recorded poetry falls from the lips of Lamech himself. They were no ordinary family. Would that the hallowing influence of the worship of God had completed the picture !

Time rolled on, and with it brought such developments of human character and tendencies as caused even the Creator himself, in the strong language of inspiration, to repent that he had made man. For years the community which were gathered about Adam and Seth kept themselves distinct from Cain's posterity, and retained in its purity the worship of the true God. But at length they commingled, and gradually almost every trace even of the knowledge of Jehovah vanished from the earth. Universal atheism or idolatry prevailed ; universal sensuality debased the race. “ All flesh corrupted his way.”

In the full belief that existence terminated at death, the sacredness of human life was disregarded, and murder stalked forth unmasked and fearless. "The earth was filled with violence."

A few exceptions there were. A few patriarchal saints lived many years to mourn over and rebuke the wickedness of their descendants, and to testify to them of the existence and goodness of the Creator. To these, from time to time, he revealed himself, and gave them instruction and encouragement. But, one after another, these monitors, hoary, not with years, but with the weight of centuries, sank to their graves, and with their departing spirits fled the last hope for the wretched race of man. In vain had Adam for nearly a thousand years remained as a witness for the truth relating to the mighty wonders of creating wisdom. In vain had Enoch walked with God, and been borne up before their eyes, untouched by death, to convince them of a higher and holier existence. In vain had the Almighty so ordered the length of man's life that the long chain of evidence from Adam to Noah had but one connecting link, Methuselah having

many years conversed with both. In vain did Noah go daily forth one hundred and twenty years to his work upon the ark, manifesting his faith in God's commands, and warning them against the coming evil day. They were completely hardened. "They ate and drank, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."

The morning on which Noah uncovered the ark, and looked abroad upon nature rejoicing in the recovered sunlight, saw no vestige of the multitudes who had once inhabited the earth. One experiment had been tried. The race is now to commence again. Noah was an obedient servant of God, and had instructed his children to follow his steps. The first act of the liberated family was to gather about the altar of sacrifice. Will the spirit of piety keep pace with the multiplying thousands of men ? Alas ! alas ! how quickly is it proved that there is no inherent excellence in human nature ! How surely is it of the "earth, earthy," and all its tendencies downward ! How true is it, also, that, thus degraded

and debased, it has no power of self-elevation or purification ! A few short years sufficed to show this in the case of Noah's descendants. They scattered abroad ; they built mighty cities ; they cultivated the arts, and increased in knowledge wonderfully ; but in moral excellence they sunk with rapid fall to the lowest point. Probably we have no conception of the extent and utter folly of the idolatry which prevailed immediately before the birth of Abraham. Lords many and gods innumerable had dominion over the tribes of men,—the hosts of heaven, the beasts of forest and field, the fowls of the air, reptiles, inanimate things, and graven images, to all of whom were ascribed a character wholly polluted and immeasurably vile. The existence of the true and living God was wholly unknown, save to a few scattered individuals. The idea of a pure and holy being was not only lost, but all power of appreciating such a character had also been destroyed, by the habitual indwelling of corrupting thoughts, and the constant expression and manifestation of sensual emotions. Already was the earth prepared for another flood. But God

had determined not thus again to destroy the work of his hands. Another plan will be devised; these sunken creatures he will elevate; this ruined race he will redeem.

Our future study will unfold this plan of mighty grace, as we see what part in its execution was allotted to the mothers whose names are mentioned in the progress of its accomplishment.

SARAH AND HAGAR.

IN pursuance of the plan which he had devised for the redemption of the race of man, God appeared to Abraham, the son of Terah, in a city called Ur, in Chaldea, and directed him to leave his country, and dwell in the land of Canaan. Among the nations, perhaps the Chaldeans had departed less from the simplicity of a true faith and worship than many others ; but they were still idolaters, and Ur, as appears from recent discoveries, was their sacred city. It is not necessary that we should dwell upon the familiar details of Abraham's separation from his country and kindred. Suffice it, that the object of his being thus separated by God was, that through his faith and obedience, through his instructions to his family, and through the seed afterward promised, the knowledge and worship of the only true God should be gradually disseminated.

Abraham obeyed the command of Jehovah, and was accompanied in his wanderings by the wife

of his youth ; henceforth the partner of his exile, and a helpmeet in his cares. They had spent hardly a year in Canaan, when a famine compelled them to repair to Egypt, where they remained three months. Sarah was a very beautiful woman, and Abraham knew that she would be peculiarly attractive to the Egyptians, because so much more fair than their swarthy countrywomen ; and the account of his deception in calling her his sister, with the consequent trouble, stands on the sacred page, a beacon against the folly of distrust-
ing God, and resorting to prevarication. The beauty of the fair Chaldean was soon in every mouth, and Sarah was taken from her supposed brother to the king's household, to go through the preliminary ceremonies and purifications which were requisite to her becoming his wife, and which usually occupied about a month. What Abraham suffered during this interval, and what were her own trials, we can only imagine. Nothing is said of the prayers which the patriarch must have offered to God ; nothing recorded of the anguish and tears of the wife, who had taken, as she believed, a final leave of her husband, and was

destined to the honor of being a favorite of Egypt's monarch. The trial was severe. God, however, interposed to save them from their fears. His judgments caused Pharaoh to inquire into the truth, and to restore Sarah before the month of preparation was ended. He dismissed them from his dominions without injury, but not without severe rebuke, and they returned to Canaan.

Ten years passed away, during which time Sarah's name is not mentioned. They had no children, but it must not be inferred that, because she had not a mother's cares, she was therefore unoccupied. It is recorded that at one time Abraham went out to fight against the Assyrian king with more than three hundred trained servants. These were all born in his house, the sacred writer informs us, and were capable of bearing arms. If we add to these those who must have remained in charge of the flocks and herds, and the women and children, we may, perhaps, form some idea of the family over which Sarah presided as mistress. The phrase "trained servants" signifies catechised, or instructed. We know that wherever Abraham pitched his tent, as

he removed from place to place, he erected an altar, and in the midst of his assembled family offered sacrifices to God. "I know him," said the Lord, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." That Sarah was a faithful wife, a prudent and discreet housekeeper, and willing to aid her husband in this important work of training his household to serve God, we have no reason to doubt. That she "labored, working with her own hands," or strictly superintended the labor of her servants, we infer from the fact that when strangers were to be entertained Abraham calls upon her to prepare the needed food. We think of her as the energetic, active head of a large and well-ordered family, and God doubtless aided and qualified her for the station she occupied.

Soon after their return from Egypt, God had appeared again to Abraham, and renewed his covenant with him, assuring him that the land of Canaan should be given to his posterity, who should be as the sands of the sea-shore, innumerable. But the years rolled by, and there was no

sign of the fulfilment of this promise. Sarah, who seems not to have possessed the unshaken faith which characterized her husband, despairing of herself becoming a mother, resorted at length to an expedient which is revolting to us, and which proved disastrous to the peace of all concerned in it. The laws and customs of the land countenanced polygamy, and Abraham, in compliance with Sarah's wishes, took Hagar, her bond-woman, for a secondary wife, in hope of gaining the long-desired blessing. Hagar was an Egyptian, and had probably become one of their family during their sojourn in her native land. She seems to have been a favorite servant, and was certainly honored in being selected as the object of her master's regards. The desired end was obtained. Hagar soon had the prospect of becoming a mother. But the happiness which Sarah anticipated did not follow. As might have been foreseen, her own jealous feelings were roused, and Hagar soon manifested the vanity and insolence which her situation, now so superior to that of her mistress, naturally called forth. She manifested her contempt in a manner so

marked that Sarah's indignation could not be controlled ; but, instead of blaming only herself, she reproached her husband. She insinuated that Hagar stood too high in his estimation, and called upon God to witness that she was wronged. The most serious unhappiness now reigned in this hitherto quiet family. Abraham might have remonstrated with Sarah, or reproached her in turn ; he might have claimed the right to protect Hagar as his wife ; but the dignity and excellence of his character appear in his answer : " Thy maid is in thine hand ; do to her as it pleaseth thee." "Sarah afflicted her." Whether it is intended that she inflicted personal chastisement upon her, as some commentators affirm, or whether the affliction consisted of bitter words, which to a sensitive spirit are worse than blows, we cannot decide. Whatever was done was sufficient to drive Hagar, in desperation, from her presence. She fled hastily to go to Egypt, her native land, but sunk exhausted, friendless, and ready to perish, by a fountain in the wilderness of Shur. Most beautiful is the description which follows the account of her flight, and wonderfully does it

show the tender mercy of God toward those who are in trouble. An angel of the Lord seeks her in her woe. He, without whose notice the sparrow cannot fall, is not unmindful of helpless, suffering woman. "And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou ? and whither wilt thou go ?" He does not call her *Abraham's wife*. It is not his part to increase her pride, and aggravate her discontent. He reminds her of her true condition, and calls up entirely different thoughts from those which she has been indulging. Those simple questions startle her from the tumultuous emotions of rebellion and presumption. Whence had she come ? From a happy, loving home, where she had been the favorite of an indulgent and gentle mistress ; a home which would speedily be yet dearer to her as the birth-place of her child,— that child who was to be the supposed heir to her master and all his sainted privileges ; from friends, from companions, all whom she loved ; and she had left them ! and whither was she going ? How might she answer, when she knew not ? How idle and impotent now seemed her previous feelings !

Those questions had flashed light on her darkened heart, and humbled her at once ; and simply and truthfully she answered, “ I flee from the presence of my mistress Sarai.”

The angel, who was no other than the glorious Messenger of the Covenant, directed her to return and submit herself to her mistress, and then, to comfort her, and enable her to bear her lot, unfolded the future. He told her she would bear a son, and bade her call him Ishmael. This is the first name given by God to any man before his birth. It signifies, “ The Lord hath heard, or will hear,” and would always remind her of his interposition in her behalf. “ Because,” said he, “ the Lord hath heard thy affliction.” He does not say, hath heard thy prayer, nor does it appear that she offered any. Has the *affliction* of his creatures such a voice that it thus reaches the Almighty ear ? Do the woes of the humblest, the poor bond-woman, call to her aid the Angel-Jehovah unsought ? O, what a view into the heart of infinite love do these few words afford ! He then utters that remarkable, prophetic description of the descendants of Ishmael, concerning

which Dr. Adam Clarke says, “It furnishes an absolute demonstrative argument of the divine origin of the Pentateuch. To attempt its refutation, in the sight of reason and common sense, would convict of most ridiculous presumption and excessive folly.” “He shall be a wild man ; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand shall be against him ; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” “We have only to turn to the page of history to see how opposite this character has been in all ages to the Arab race, the descendants of Ishmael. They have occupied the same country, and followed the same mode of life, from the days of their great ancestor down to the present time ; and range the wide extent of burning sands which separate them from all surrounding nations, as rude, as savage, and as untractable, as the wild ass himself.” “Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work betimes for a prey : the wilderness yieldeth food for them and for their children.” We have not time to dwell upon all the beauties of this wonderful prophecy, but beg our readers not to be satisfied by merely reading it in their Bibles. If

they will study it thoroughly in the light which its fulfilment during four thousand years affords, they will be amply repaid for the labor.

Whether Hagar had imbibed the faith of Abraham and Sarah in the true God, or whether her heart still clung to the idols of her early home, we do not know. When she cast herself, trembling and fainting, upon the ground by the well-side in the wilderness, she probably thought not of turning to either for aid. Weary and sick in body, and tempest-tost on a sea of conflicting passions, she thought only of her wretchedness, and scarcely hoped for deliverance. Now how changed! Refreshed, comforted, blessed, she rises with humility and joy in her heart, and expressions of devout gratitude on her lips, and prepares to retrace her steps. She could no longer doubt the existence and infinite kindness of Abraham's God. When she had thought herself alone, he was near, a witness to all her grief. When her master, whom she so much loved, the father of her child, had with seeming indifference given her up to her mistress, and that mistress had dealt hardly with her, and she felt she had

not a friend on earth, he had befriended her, had spoken words of kindness, and promised her great and wonderful blessings. She had seen him, she had heard his voice. Awe-struck, and wondering that she still lived after having seen Jehovah, she turned from the spot, which from that day was called “The well of the angel of life, who appeared there.”

Hagar returned to her home, as she had been directed, but whether she went to peace or further affliction is not disclosed. We infer, however, that her own altered deportment, and the birth of her child, which occurred soon after, put an end for the time to the bitter troubles caused by Sarah’s unhappy expedient. Abraham was extremely fond of his son, and Sarah regarded him as her own ; and doubtless the mother’s heart rejoiced in seeing the boy an object of such care. He was exalted far above herself in station ; but she was his mother, and permitted to perform toward him a mother’s part, and to feel all a mother’s happiness in his unfolding powers.

Nearly thirteen years passed quietly on, bringing with them no events of sufficient import-

ance to be noticed by the inspired penman. No further revelation from God disturbed the delusion under which Abram and Sarah labored, that Ishmael was the promised seed, the heir of the covenant; and he was doubtless trained up in his father's house in a manner suitable to his future expectations. The time, however, at length came when Jehovah would more fully unfold his plans. Abram had nearly reached the age of a hundred years, and Sarah was almost ninety, when he once more appeared, and said, "I am God all-sufficient ; walk before me, and be thou perfect." This language seems to convey a reproof for their want of faith in his promises, and resorting to expedients of their own devising, and bids them henceforth act with more simplicity, and leave God to bring about his designs in his own way. He then entered into a solemn covenant with Abram, in which he included all his posterity to the latest generation. He also changed their names. Abram, which signifies "an eminent father," he called Abraham, "an eminent father of a multitude ;" and Sarai, "my princess," or, as we more familiarly say,

queen of her own household, he called Sarah, “princess of a multitude ;” and then for the first time announced that the promised seed should descend from her : “I will give thee a son also of her ;” “she shall be a mother of nations.”

Not long after this, the Lord again reiterates his promise, in an interview which is beautifully described in the sacred volume.

In the delightful oak-grove of Mamre, in the midst of a sultry summer day, the patriarch sat at the door of his tent, enjoying the slight breeze, and resting from toil, which the intense heat of the Eastern climate forbids during certain hours. All around, at short distances, were the tents of his numerous dependants, their occupants reposing like himself, or scattered abroad with the flocks and herds. All was quiet and peaceful, until the sound of coming footsteps disturbed his meditations, and warned him of the approach of strangers. Abraham, obeying the quick impulse of hospitality, hastened to greet them, and invite them to repose under the grateful shade, and offer them the refreshments they needed. He provided water for their feet, and, entering the

tent, directed Sarah to prepare food and set before them ; which being done, he served them himself, according to the custom of his time. While they sat eating, the chief of them suddenly asked him, "Where is Sarah, thy wife ?" It was an extraordinary question. The women of the East live in the closest seclusion, having no intercourse with strangers, nor with any of the opposite sex, save their husbands, and with them they are never permitted to sit at the same table. A traveller remarks that one who should ask another of the health of his wife and family would be considered as offering him a downright insult. The question must, therefore, have greatly surprised Abraham. He answered, briefly, that Sarah was in the tent. "I will certainly return unto thee," continued his mysterious, though now no longer unknown visitor, "and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Their table was spread at no great distance from the tent-door, and Sarah, in her private apartment, was an astonished listener to this strange conversation. We have before said that she did not partake of her husband's implicit faith. When she heard the

announcement that she should bear a son, it was to her only ridiculous. The infinite power of him who promised she wholly overlooked, and remembered only that she had long passed the age when maternity was possible, in the ordinary course of events. She laughed incredulously at what she heard. Omniscience pierces any barrier. “Wherefore did Sarah laugh?” said he. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Terrified at being detected, Sarah now came forth from the tent, and, in her fear and confusion, “denied, saying, I laughed not.” One penetrating look, and the quiet, firm reply, “Nay, but thou didst laugh,” were sufficient to send her back to her retirement in penitence, a wiser and a better woman. From this time her character seems to have undergone a change. Her distrust of God was gone, and Paul, in days long after, numbers her among those who were illustrious for their faith, attributing the birth of Isaac to her implicit reliance on the word of the Almighty: “She judged him faithful who had promised, and received strength.”

Not long after this, Abraham removed from

Mamre, where he had long resided, and went to dwell in Gerah, the capital of the Philistines. Here was reënacted the same folly which had formerly cost them so much in Egypt, and which it is most marvellous to us should have ever been forgotten. Sarah was again taken by a heathen king, and only restored to her husband by the intervention of Jehovah. She was at this time ninety years of age, yet so remarkable was her beauty that she was as much an object of attraction as in her youthful days, and Abimelech, after reproving Abraham for his deception, hinted to her, that it would be becoming in her to wear, when among strangers, a closely-covering veil, such as was universally customary among females resident in towns, in order to avoid the dangers to which her beauty exposed her. So far as we can gather from the sacred volume, Sarah was at this very time pregnant by the miraculous power of Jehovah, which renders the whole scene still more remarkable.

Whether they remained long in Gerah, we are not informed, nor where Isaac was born. But the joyful day came at length. “After a childless

union of more than sixty years," Abraham and Sarah welcomed with delight the heir of the promises, the covenanted gift of Jehovah. They called him Isaac. "There shall be laughter;" "All that hear will laugh with me," said Sarah; and, indeed, few events, if any, recorded on the sacred page, were welcomed with so much rejoicing. Nearly three years, according to the custom of her nation, Sarah nourished her infant at her own breast; and only a mother can imagine her heartfelt happiness and gratitude during that delightful time. "And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned." It was a bright, joyous day; friends were congregated, tables of abundance were spread, congratulations were poured forth; while the unconscious object of all, the pride and joy of fond parents, the hope of generations to come, pursued his childish sports, and expressed his childish wonder at the scene. But, like many sunny mornings of earth, it was to be overhung with clouds, its joy to be damped by deep sorrow.

Two hearts were there which no gladness

visited, and in which no good feelings were cherished. Ishmael and his mother were envious and discontented witnesses of all that occurred. The happiness of others was their sorrow, the fulfilment of hope to Abraham and Sarah was their bitter disappointment ; and they manifested their dissatisfaction, Hagar, probably, by pouring out her thoughts to her son, and he by ridiculing and speaking contemptuously of Isaac. Sarah saw and heard, and all that was to come in the future—the discord and wrangling, the endless disputes and heart-burnings, the evil and perhaps malicious influence over her precious child—flashed instantly upon her mind, and, urged by an impulse too strong to be resisted, she sought her husband, and demanded that Hagar should be divorced, and Ishmael disinherited. It was a grievous request to Abraham. Ishmael was his own son, his first-born and first-beloved ; and toward Hagar he felt the tenderness of a father for the mother of his child. He appears to have appealed to God, who bade him do as Sarah had said, for Isaac was to be his only heir ; but, at the same time, soothed his grief, and allayed his anx-

ieties, by promising that Ishmael, for his sake, should be abundantly prospered and blessed.

Early on the morning which followed the weaning feast, Abraham arose to execute his sorrowful task. Calling Hagar, he gave her the necessary directions for her future course, placed on her shoulder a leatheren bottle of water, and bread sufficient for their present wants, and then, putting Ishmael's hand in hers, he bade them a final farewell, and sent them on their way. Wonderful, indeed, was the faith and obedience of Abraham !

The wanderers bent their steps toward the uninhabited region beyond Beersheba, Hagar probably intending, as before, to go to Egypt. She was unhappy then, but more miserable now, and yet deeper trouble awaited her. The water was soon gone, and Ishmael, overcome with fatigue and thirst, was unable to proceed ; and when she saw him lying helpless, and apparently about to die, in her anguish she left him, that she might not witness the closing of eyes so dear, forever. Did she now call to mind her former deliverance ? Did the name of her son recall the scene at the

"well of the angel of life," and induce her again to seek his aid ? We do not know. But whether she called or not, that blessed angel was near her now, as before. Once more his heavenly voice addressed her : " What aileth thee, Hagar ? Fear not ; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is."

* * * * *

She was relieved and her child restored. Blessed and comforted by the promises of God, she went on her way. Ishmael was at this time sixteen years of age ; and though, as we read the account, we feel that it was cruel to send him forth from the luxuries and privileges of his father's house, to provide for himself, it was not so in fact. The younger sons of a family were generally thus sent to seek their fortunes. He chose for his home a spot uninhabited and wild, the resort of many animals proper for food, and by the use of his bow he was able amply to supply his own and his mother's wants, and was soon, as had been promised, a prosperous man.

Hagar, we are told, took him a wife from her native land, and from him descended a race not

less remarkable than the Israelites themselves. The faithfulness of Abraham has had its reward not alone in the blessings bestowed on the chosen seed.

After the departure of Hagar and Ishmael little is recorded concerning the family of Abraham. They dwelt at Beersheba, and, so far as we know, their life passed quietly. Of Sarah's character as a mother we earnestly wish to know more than we are told. Not a word is said of her instructions to her cherished son, and we can only gather the proof of her faithfulness from the excellent character of Isaac. We know that daily lessons of obedience to his parents were instilled into his young mind, for he hesitated not to follow his father, unquestioned, to the Mount of Moriah, and to do his bidding to the utmost. And in later years, he with the same spirit acceded to his father's wishes in respect to the most important interests of his life, receiving even his wife from his hands, apparently without the slightest disposition to select for himself the partner of his life, after his father had desired to do it for him. We know that the most unwavering confidence in God

had been wrought into his whole life, for he submitted without shrinking to be bound and laid upon the altar of sacrifice at the divine command, manifesting a faith scarcely inferior to that of Abraham himself. We know that a mother's untiring, devoted love, had been his daily blessing, and had linked his heart to hers in ties which might not be sundered without deepest anguish, for he knew no comfort after her death, till three years had fled, and Rebecca was given to cheer his solitude. We are certain that a holy example, the sacred influence of daily prayer, the habitual prominence given to sacred and divine realities, and frequent instructions concerning his obligations to honor his father's God, trained this child of the covenant to fill the place assigned him in the mighty plan of grace.

Many years he enjoyed his mother's care and counsels; he seems to have been her constant companion, and from that companionship he gained a gentleness and loveliness of character, very remarkable in a man.

The strongest earthly ties are frail when death appears. Sarah's death and the circumstances

of her burial are touchingly described in the sacred volume, and it is worthy of notice, that she is the only woman to whom such honor is given. Abraham was a stranger and sojourner in the land of Canaan, and had hitherto owned not a foot of the land promised to his descendants, nor had he needed such possession. Cared for by God, and surrounded by those he loved, every place was home. But now, death had removed the light of his eyes, the fond companion of his days. Sixty-two years had she shared his every joy and sorrow, and cheered his pilgrim lot. But now she would no longer gladden his tent, nor accompany him in his wanderings. She had daily bowed with him, through those long years, in sincere and humble worship of the living God, and their united faith had drawn from him wonderful, even miraculous blessings. But now her familiar form would appear no more at the sacred altar, nor her confidence in the Almighty strengthen his own. He had loved her in their early days, when she was the pride and joy of his Chaldean home, but she was far dearer to him when he looked upon her, after nearly a century

had passed over her head, with beauty unimpaired, her youth renewed by the kindness of God, folding to her mother's breast the long-desired and most precious son of promise. "A babe in a house is not merely a well-spring of pleasure," and "a messenger of peace and love," but infancy and childhood ever bring with them freshening and revivifying influences. Abraham had felt their influences himself, and seen their effect on Sarah, and we can well believe that their evening-time had been brighter than the morning.

But she was gone, and the question came, "where should he lay, for their last repose, the remains of his beloved and faithful wife?" Not in the burying-places of the idolaters! He could not endure the thought. He purchased the cave of Machpelah, and, with weeping and mourning, buried his dead out of his sight.

Around that grave of Sarah how many sacred associations linger. There, when years had passed, Isaac and Ishmael met, for the first time, perhaps, since the weaning feast, to lay their honored father by her side. "There they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife; there Jacob buried

Leah," and thither went up from Egypt the "chariots and horsemen, a very great company," who, with Joseph, bore the body of Jacob also to the same quiet resting-place. Upon the hills of that beautiful region the mighty Anakims dwelt, and from thence, more than four hundred years after, when the descendants of Abraham were returning from bondage, the spies sent by Moses brought back the evil report which resulted in the many wanderings of the wilderness. On that spot stood one of the most ancient cities of the world — the possession of Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, where the tribes received their inheritance, and later, a city of refuge, and assigned to the Levites. There David held his court seven years, and there Absalom raised the standard of revolt. And when centuries had rolled away, when the long-expected Messiah was at hand, to that sacred "city in the hill-country of Judah, went, in haste," the most highly favored among women, the virgin mother of Jesus, to exchange congratulations with her only less favored cousin, and to pour forth her song of exultation and triumph. The spot on which Abraham and Sarah dwelt so long,

and where their bones reposed, where the Almighty had reiterated his solemn promises,—thousands of years after, witnessed Mary's joy, and echoed her song of gratitude to him whose word abideth forever, for the fulfilment of those very assurances. “My soul doth magnify the Lord ; he hath holpen his servant Israel *in remembrance of his mercy ; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed forever.*”

A multitude of reflections crowd upon us as we draw to a close our account of Sarah and Hagar, to which we can do no justice. Indeed, we feel that we have given a meagre transcript of our own thoughts while studying this deeply interesting history. We earnestly request those who have read these pages, not to rest for a moment satisfied, but to take the sacred book, and, asking light from above, give themselves to the work of gaining all the instruction it affords upon this theme. We assure them that encouragement, strength, and blessing will be their reward. Especially, they shall gain delightful views of the character of Jehovah, and be able to sing as never before, “Exalt the Lord our God.”

“Praise ye the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever.”

Sarah, notwithstanding her dignified station, her wonderful beauty and noble character, was still an imperfect woman; yet how kindly was she dealt with; what honor has God put upon her. She consented to prevarication and deceit with her husband, but the evil consequences which they deserved were once and again prevented by divine interposition. She laughed incredulously at his gracious words of promise, and then denied her fault. Yet, in consideration of her “fear and amazement,” she was not severely reproved, the blessing was not withheld, nor was her fault noticed to the exclusion of what was otherwise good in her conduct, for, by the mouth of Peter, God afterward commends her reverence for her husband, manifested at that very time. She was faithless, and jealous, and angry in her dealings with Hagar, yet the Almighty did not take his favor from her, while he suffered her to reap the bitter fruit of her folly. As a mother, how remarkable is his kindness to her. “She was ninety years of age when Isaac

was born. In the course of nature ten or twelve years would have closed her mortal career, or rendered it, from the infirmities of age, a burden to herself and all around her. There was apparently no need of her preservation to forward the decrees of the Lord. In giving birth to the child of promise, her part was fulfilled, and at the age of ten or twelve the boy might have done without her. But God is LOVE, and the affections of his children are, in their strength and purity, peculiarly acceptable to him. He never bestoweth happiness to withdraw it; and therefore, to perfect the felicity of Sarah and her child, his tenderness preserved her in life and vigor seven and thirty years after she had given him birth. The trial of faith, also, in the sacrifice of his son, was given to the father. He demanded not from her what he knew the mother could not bear."

Strikingly, too, is the loving-kindness of God manifested in Hagar's history. She was not of the chosen race; she was but a humble bond-woman, and very faulty in character, yet he took cognizance of her woes, and twice came in his

own glorious person to her aid, and bestowed upon her rich and abundant blessings.

Would that, amid our many cares, anxieties, and sorrows, we could ever bear in mind the love of him who wove the ties by which our hearts are bound to our children, whose tenderness and sympathy are never-failing, who says to every one of his redeemed children, “Can a mother forget her child ? Yea, they may, yet will I not forget thee.”

THE WIFE OF LOT.

“Remember Lot’s wife.”

THIS was our Saviour’s injunction, and in obedience to it we here take occasion to address some, who, though not generally interested in the study of the Bible, nor in such volumes as this, may nevertheless glance over its pages, either accidentally or at the suggestion of a friend.

Do not be offended that we charge you with the same faults as she possessed, who was made a perpetual monument of folly, and whom you have ever been accustomed to regard with dislike, and whom you think you do not in any particular resemble.

Have you ever seriously considered the nature of the sin which Lot’s wife committed? Are you quite sure that you are not chargeable with like foolishness? Lot and his family dwelt in Sodom, a place where not a single righteous man or worshipper of the true God could be found, save himself. The cry of the wickedness of that wicked

city rose up to heaven, and God determined to destroy it. He sent an angel, who warned Lot to flee, with all his household, to the mountains, and to go in such haste as not to cast a single glance behind, lest the scorching heat of the fearful flame should devour them before they reached a place of safety. They went; but the wife and mother, not believing the message of the angel, and grieved at leaving her home and worldly possessions, turned a lingering, longing look back on the doomed city, and was instantly destroyed. Her sin was unbelief,— its fruit was disobedience to the direct command of God.

You, dear friends, live in a world in which like sentence has gone forth. “The earth, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.” Do you believe this word of God? Perhaps you will answer that it is of little consequence whether you do believe or not, as the day is far distant, and will affect you little. But there is another word of God which is addressed to you. “It is appointed unto men once to die.” Do you believe this? You will say it is preposterous to ask such a question. We know that we shall die; we

must believe that. But do you act as if you believed it? Are you prepared for it? Are you so training your children that they shall be prepared for it? When the summons comes, will it find you willing to leave this world, and all its pleasures, and enter at God's command on untried scenes? There is yet another message which God is even now speaking in your ears: "Flee from the wrath to come." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Is this message any more acceptable to you than was that of the angel to Lot's wife? Do you credit it at all? Are you taking any means to avoid the wrath or gain the faith of which it speaks? Are you daily instructing your children, those who are so precious to you that you would shield them with your life from harm, to flee from this fearful wrath? When you lie down at night and when you wake, do you earnestly pray for mercy for them and yourself? Do you lead their young affections to the Saviour, as the one most worthy of their love? Do you teach them to bend the knee and

fold the little hands in prayer? Is there anything in your daily life to convince them that you fully believe this truth of God's word? Do you not rather so live as to prove yourselves participators in the very sins of Lot's wife,—unbelief and disobedience?

We beg you, by your peace of mind, by your own eternal welfare, by your love for the immortal beings committed to your care, by the death and atoning sacrifice of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to "*think on these things.*"

Perhaps you are devising plans and cherishing expectations for your loved ones, which such views as these would disturb and destroy. In this, also, your circumstances are not unlike those of the mother of Lot's children. She had two daughters who were affianced to two men of that gay but devoted city. Doubtless she rejoiced in what she considered their good fortune and excellent prospects. Have you ever inquired after the fate of those daughters, and the result of their early training? Seek the history in the book of God, and do not turn away with disgust because we have directed you to it, and with

entire assurance that your daughters will walk the path of life clear of all such dangers. *The worldly-minded, ungodly mother has no security for the upright conduct of her children, even according to the low standard of the world's morality.* The only security for ourselves, and those to whom we have given being, is a firm faith in the words of God, and an obedient spirit to his commands. Failing of these, we may any of us be as lasting monuments of his displeasure as Lot's wife ; and our children may sink to a degradation even worse than that of hers.

REBEKAH.

THREE striking and instructive pictures present themselves to us as we commence the study of Rebekah's life, which we cannot do better than contemplate with earnest interest and attention.

ABRAHAM AND ELIEZER.

Three years have circled their lonely round since Sarah went to her rest. They have done the work of a longer time upon Abraham, and he now appears before us an old man, stricken in years, upon whom a hundred and forty winters have shed their snows, and who has few remaining duties to perform this side the grave. With him is Eliezer, the tried and faithful steward of his household, and, like himself, the obedient servant of God. The time has come when, in accordance with the habit of his nation, the father must select a wife for his son. Apparently the subject has cost him much anxious thought. Upon Isaac's marriage great results depend. He cannot see

him wedded to one of the idolatrous daughters of Canaan. That were to frustrate the purposes of God, and thus surely defeat his own happiness. The land of Canaan has been promised to his descendants indeed, but not through any such connection with its present occupants will the promise be accomplished. They are a guilty race, fast filling up their measure of iniquity, and devoted to merited destruction by the righteous judgment of Heaven. To be united with them were to share their doom. Abraham in this emergency had, doubtless, asked counsel of his covenant God, and he has summoned Eliezer to aid him in prosecuting his present design of bringing a wife for Isaac from among his own kindred. He requires from him a solemn oath that he will faithfully execute the mission. Eliezer, wishing fully to understand his master's wishes, and unwilling to bind himself to what he may not be able to perform, replies, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land, must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?" The answer is instant and decided, "Beware that thou

bring not my son thither again." He, indeed, desires him to have a wife from Mesopotamia, but nothing in Abraham's eyes was ever so important as the exact fulfilment of all the commands of God. He would not, for any reason, have Isaac leave the country in which, by Jehovah's express will, they sojourned. In the spirit of obedience, and of the faith which never forsook him, he assures Eliezer that he will be guided and prospered, and will succeed in his endeavor. "The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land: he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife for my son from thence."

Eliezer took the required oath, and "arose and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor."

ELIEZER AND REBEKAH.

It is the close of day, the time when the women of the East go forth to draw water, as is their universal custom. Dressed in their best attire, the young maidens gather about the well,

to relate the news of the day, and refresh themselves, even in the midst of their weary task, by pleasant intercourse. As they come one by one to the usual place of meeting, their attention is attracted by a group of strangers stationed at the well-side : men of foreign garb, and camels kneeling to rest, all evidently from a journey through the desert. We are drawn ourselves to scan this group more closely. One man appears to be chief among them, and his conduct fixes our attention. He seems like one who has some important business in hand, and upon whom some weight of responsibility rests. As we look, he employs himself with caring for his camels and attendants, and when this is done assumes the air and attitude of solemn devotion. But he bows to no idol. He prefers an earnest suit, but to none of the gods of the land. He addresses Jehovah, the God of Abraham. His prayer is most remarkable. It breathes a faith which to common mortals appears like presumption. Yet it is not unacceptable to God. Such confidence in his overruling providence, and his willingness to guide those who are in perplexity, exalts the King

of kings. He will surely make a plain path for all who thus pray. There is in the heart which is truly devoted to God a noting of circumstances, a watching unto prayer, a disposition to see him, and ascertain his will, in all events, which cannot fail of its reward.

“ And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water ; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water ; and let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink ; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also : let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac ; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master.”

As he closes his petition, a beautiful girl comes from the way of the city, and, without stopping to gossip with her young companions, or appearing to heed the presence of strangers, descends the steps to the well, and is soon seen laboring up the ascent, with her pitcher filled upon her

shoulder. Eliezer — for it is he — watches her closely. Her beauty and grace attract and please him, and, impelled by an irresistible impulse, he hastens to meet her, and begs her to give him water from her pitcher. With ready kindness she answers, “Drink, my lord, and I will draw water for thy camels also,” and immediately hastens to fill the empty trough, ascending and descending many times the weary way to the well. We feel indignant as we gaze at the indolent men who stand by and offer no assistance. They seem to us unmanly, and she engaged in work for which she is hardly equal. But it is the custom of her country, and she deems it no hardship. She is also evidently more than ordinarily amiable and courteous. Eliezer looks on, while she is thus engaged, with admiration and hope, and when her task is accomplished, asks her, with trembling eagerness, “Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee.” Little suspecting the deep import of the question, or what life-long interests are to hang upon her words, she answers, with prompt and beautiful simplicity, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah.”

Astonishment is depicted on the faces of the wondering damsels at the deportment of the stranger on this announcement. He seems beside himself with joy. He puts upon Rebekah's arms bracelets of richest workmanship, and gives her other ornaments of value, and then again, unmindful of all about him, bows and worships as before.

Many are the prayers for aid which go up in the time of need from the children of men, but very few, in comparison, are the thank-offerings which acknowledge the gift when received. Often only one in ten is found who gives glory to God for his prompt bestowal of desired good. Eliezer was in heart and soul the true servant of Jehovah, as his outpouring of gratitude at Rebekah's answer proves.

Meanwhile, Rebekah herself, bewildered and surprised, hastens to tell her mother what had befallen her, and to send her brother to invite the stranger home. He comes, and relates his story to the eagerly listening family. Well did they know the history of Abraham's departure from country and kindred at the command of an unknown God, and tidings had from time to time

reached them of his obedience and faithfulness, and of the prosperity which had attended him. They could not but admire his noble character, and they had learned to reverence the God whom he served, though still themselves adhering to their idols. And now, when the errand of Eliezer is made known, they receive it as an intimation of the will of Jehovah, and without hesitation assent to his proposals.

Again Eliezer worships and gives thanks ; costly jewels of gold and silver are brought forth, and rich raiment ; goodly gifts are bestowed ; a table is spread, and joy and gladness prevail.

* * * * *

The morning has come — such a morning as Rebekah never saw before. Yestereven she went forth free, and careless, and light-hearted, to meet her young companions at the well ; to-day she rises the betrothed bride of her unknown cousin — the destined wife of him who is the vowed follower of that strange God, whose very name fills her spirit with awe. Henceforth, in obedience to his high commands, and for the love of one whom she has never seen, she must be an

exile from home and friends, and share a destiny widely different from any which had ever before filled her youthful imagination or inspired her hopes. Can she go? It is needless to ask. The question has been decided without consulting her wishes, and she dreams not of any objection to that decision. But twelve hours have changed her greatly. She has laid aside the gayety and freedom of girlhood. A burden of thoughtfulness rests upon her, and the calm dignity of the woman appears in word and action, as she prepares, at the urgent request of Eliezer, to depart immediately on the journey to Beersheba.

The necessary arrangements are soon completed, the parting embrace is given and received, the blessings of full hearts are bestowed, the long caravan is directed to move — she is gone. The hand of the Lord is in it.

REBEKAH AND ISAAC.

The time has arrived when Eliezer may be expected to return from Mesopotamia, and Isaac comes from the south country, where he has been for a time residing, to the house of his father, to

learn the result of his mission. He has gone forth in the beautiful and quiet evening to meditate in the fields and commune with God. Serene and happy from that communion, he is now seen walking to meet the caravan, which at this moment appears in sight, slowly winding along the road to Beersheba. As he approaches, the riders alight from their camels and advance to meet him. Few words are spoken as they proceed on foot to the encampment of Abraham. Isaac conducts his youthful bride, completely veiled, and wholly unknown, to his mother's tent, and bids her call it henceforth her home. Amid the hallowed associations of that sacred spot, he receives to his heart the gentle and confiding being who, leaving forever the home of her childhood, and all loved scenes, has dared the dangers of the desert, to walk the journey of life with one of whose character she has known little, and on whose face she till now has never looked.

She stands before him in youthful beauty and modest grace, his loving and beloved wife, and Isaac is comforted for the first time since his mother's parting kiss had left him alone and sad.

Can such a marriage be happy ? I hear my young readers ask. Not for worlds would we be wedded thus. We would not have our parents choose for us the partners of our life. We would not give ourselves to one of whom we knew nothing, and who had never expressed a preference for us. We could not be happy—it is impossible.

Be not too hasty, my young friends. Happiness is the gift of God, not the result of fortunate circumstances, and pleasant coincidences, and nice adaptations of character. His blessing can render any union bright, and without that blessing the fairest prospects shall prove false and fleeting.

Can this blessing be certainly secured ? Yes. Consider the character and conduct of those engaged in the transactions of which we have read. Abraham seeks a wife for Isaac. What is his ruling desire ? The approbation of God. Her person, her situation in life, her fortunes, these are nothing to him ; but she must be one whom he knows God will approve. Isaac is a man of prayer and faith. In perfect simplicity and confidence he leaves this important interest of his life

wholly to God's direction ; even the very servant who goes on the mission is a man of rare piety, to whom prayer is a necessity, and who regards every event as an intimation of the will of Jehovah. Every step is taken, everything is done, with direct reference to his approbation, and will he fail to bless and prosper ? No, verily. He never yet said to any such, " Seek ye my face in vain." He will watch over Isaac and his youthful wife for good. Long years shall they walk hand in hand, and theirs shall be a union such as we read of seldom on the sacred page, unbroken to the end of life, which no jealousy shall mar, and not even the wide-spread practice of polygamy, that curse of domestic peace, shall ever be permitted to invade. Rebekah is, indeed, now a worshipper of idols, but she has already learned to fear His mighty name, and he will by his grace, and because his glory has been sought, render her worthy to be the wife of Isaac and mother of the promised seed — an important link in that mighty chain of events which will at length usher upon the world the reign of Him in whom all the nations shall be blessed.

" Prayer is the slender nerve that moveth the muscles of Omnipotence."

Wouldst thou have a path of usefulness and peace pointed out to thee by him who directeth all events, and ordereth the lot of man, pray sincerely and earnestly for it, young adventurer over the rugged ways of earth, and thy prayer shall move the Almighty hand ; that hand which alone can make the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.

* * * * *

Beside the well Lahairoi, not far from Beersheba, are pitched the spreading and far-reaching tents of Isaac, the faithful and prospered servant of Jehovah. Blessings from above have waited on his steps ; his goings out and comings in have been beneath the smile of the Lord his Maker. Serene and peaceful has been his life, passed in quiet pursuits, in the society of his gentle wife, and in frequent intercourse with his honored father. It would seem that perfect content should be the portion of those so favored. But we find it not thus. In the retirement of their tent, at the close of the day, twenty years from their

bridal, Isaac and Rebekah sit conversing, long, earnestly and anxiously ; and at last, as if by mutual impulse, they kneel together in prayer, and Isaac pours forth their joint supplications for a crowning blessing, without which all others prove incapable of rendering them truly satisfied and happy. Listen, while the meek and trusting servant pleads with his covenant-keeping God. He recalls the day when Jehovah summoned his father from his native land, and recounts the promises of divine love made to him and his seed after him. Can those reiterated promises fail ? Is God a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent ? “ In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” “ If thou be able to number the stars, so shall thy seed be.” These words surely were not lightly spoken. They were uttered by him who is mighty in working, as wise in counsel. Isaac believes, and therefore prays, and they rise refreshed, and at ease, doubting nothing, and resorting to no crooked policy to secure their earnest wishes.

Beautiful is the faith of those who thus simply and confidently make known their desires to

Jehovah, and glorious is the condescension and grace of their Omnipotent Friend, who bends a listening ear to hear, and reaches forth a willing hand to fulfil their requests. Far too seldom and too briefly do we dwell on the thought of that wonderful love, which is so ready, not merely to save our souls and give us heavenly bliss, but also to secure our present happiness.

Twenty years have rolled since their marriage-day, and Isaac and Rebekah are childless. They cannot be happy thus. They tell their disappointment to him who has the control of all events, and humbly ask his interposition, and obtain the desired blessing. There is no event interesting to us which attracts not the notice of our heavenly Father, and which we may not submit to him, as a sympathizing friend. No earthly friend can possibly appreciate our sorrows, or understand our necessities, as he does, and no human heart owns a love so pure, so unselfish, so strong, as he feels for every child he has on earth.

If we are childless, we may ask him to pity our loneliness. Many of his devoted children have thus appealed to him, and been heard. If

we have children who are sources of deep anxiety, we may always cast our care upon him. Even he once said, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."

* * * * *

The mother is distressed. With what delightful consciousness that a new life is springing from her own, has come also an intuitive sense that all is not right, and again she seeks God. If, in love and mercy, he has answered her prayer, and the wish of her life is to be gratified, why this unwonted suffering? She asks at his mouth, and receives a reply which foretells the cares and anxieties of her future life, and lays a foundation for the only departure from strict rectitude which is recorded in her history. She shall bear two sons, who, from the very commencement, are to be antagonistic to each other, and the elder shall not be the heir of Abraham's promised blessings. Did Rebekah comprehend the full import of these words? Did she gain from them a glimpse of the troubled life she was to lead? We do not know. Her boys were wel-

comed with all a mother's tenderness, and probably shared equally, for a time, her care and love, though it may be that her eye sometimes fastened on Jacob with deeper interest, as she recalled the words of the Lord, and remembered that he was the chosen seed. A happy family now gathered nightly in Isaac's tent, and the joy was complete when Abraham, the aged and infirm, but deeply respected and loved grandfather, joined the circle, and dandled on his knees the grandsons whom his dim eyes were so gladdened to behold. Fifteen years he watched their growth, and rejoiced in their unfolding faculties, and then departed from earth, and they saw him laid in the grave of Machpelah, by her side who had been to their father the fondest and most faithful of mothers, and whose name they had been taught to revere and love.

Years rolled on, many years, bringing with them to Rebekah the cares and anxieties of a mother's life, and also a mother's rich compensations. She was no longer lonely or listless. Every day brought new joys and new employments, and more imperative necessity for discre-

tion and wisdom in the management of her charge. Every day unfolded the opposite characters of her children. Esau, ever impulsive, ardent, and overbearing, yet overflowing with affection, required an entirely different discipline from his unassuming and quiet brother, whose winning traits and obedient spirit, in contrast with Esau's turbulence, at length caused her to swerve so widely from the path of maternal rectitude. Yet there was much in Esau's manly activity to call forth admiration, and she, doubtless, often felt a mother's pride when she saw him return from the field, glowing with health, and flushed with the exhilaration of successful sport, to lay his trophies at the feet of his aged and fond father, and prepare the venison that he loved. But her heart turned in its tenderness to him who was considerate of her slightest wish, and with whom, moreover, she knew the blessing of Jehovah rested.

But notwithstanding the difference in the two boys, and notwithstanding the evil partiality of both parents, no serious unhappiness followed, until, at the age of forty years, Esau suddenly withdrew from the little circle, and established a

family of his own, by taking two wives from among the idolaters around them. Heeding not the known will of Jehovah, and little regarding the wishes of his parents, or the grief he might cause them, he, from this time, manifested such an indifference to holy things, such a contempt even for the blessings covenanted to his family, such a thoroughly selfish disposition, as to prove himself wholly unworthy of his birthright privileges, and increase his mother's fondness for her younger son. The bitter evil to which that overweening fondness at length led, we are all familiar with. She allowed herself to dwell too often on the faults of one child and the virtues of the other, until she came at length to deceive her husband, to stain, by her own example and counsel, the soul of her loved one with falsehood and fraud, to embitter and madden the heart of her eldest-born, and bring upon her own and her husband's declining years sorrow and desolation.

* * * *

Alone and sorrowful, bearing the marks of age and care, and wrapped in absorbing meditations, Rebekah sits in her tent, at the close of a day

which has been to her one of sadness and gloom. We will suppose it the anniversary of the birth of her children, three years subsequent to the bestowal of the paternal benediction upon Jacob. She is reviewing her life. She wanders back in imagination more than a hundred years, to her bridal day, and recalls the happiness and peacefulness of the period when she was her husband's dearest companion, and when no oppressing care weighed upon her spirit. She remembers how, as the months sped, their desire for the fulfilment of the divine promise led them at last to plead earnestly for the blessing of a child. It is now eighty years since that prayer was fulfilled. How vividly do the scenes present themselves before her. Her joy at the prospect of becoming a mother, and then her anxiety caused by the unusual suffering she experienced. She remembers the answer given by the Almighty to her inquiry, "Why am I thus?" and a groan escapes her lips. Then commenced the sorrows of her life. Not because new cares then began; not because the quiet of her days was then changed for the excitements which children ever bring. These

might have been only sources of new pleasure. But, then commenced her sin. O, what misery had it caused her, and what self-reproach did she now feel! Had she been a faithful and just mother; had she bestowed equal affection upon her children, the life-long conflict between them might have been spared. How plainly her early mistakes appear before her now; how clear in memory's glass is pictured every evil consequence! The childish quarrels, the more bitter differences of riper years, and, worse than all, the serious defects of character which both exhibited. Had she always regarded Esau with a mother's tender love, Jacob, in all probability, would not have taken advantage of his brother's extremity to defraud him of his birthright. Had she not overvalued Jacob on account of his being heir of the covenant, Esau might not have come to despise its privileges. She follows down the track of years, dwelling long and earnestly on all the joys and sorrows they had brought. But most painfully present to her mind is the day of her severest trial and her worst sin. Again, in imagination, she hears Isaac's command to Esau

to bring him venison from the field, and receive his blessing, and feels anew the tumult of thought which those words occasioned, and the distress lest Jacob should after all be set aside. Her sudden resolve, and hasty efforts to prevent such a calamity, rise before her. Again she prepares the kid, and disguises her fair son with its delicate skin, and quiets his remonstrances and fears by assuming herself all the risk, even the curse which might descend. She takes from their sacred resting-place the sacerdotal garments kept for this important occasion, and with them arrays her favorite, and, when all is prepared, listens in breathless anxiety to all that passes in that fearful interview. How dreadful in her ears are the reiterated falsehoods of the son whom, up to that hour, she had ever taught to revere the truth. How she shudders as she recalls his impious appeal to the aid of the Almighty. Even Isaac's solemn blessing thrills her heart with fear. And then that exceeding great and bitter cry of her first-born, her long slighted, deeply injured son, how it echoes through the chambers of her soul, and seems by some mysterious power to enlighten

the darkness, and reveal to her the secret workings of that blind partiality which had so induced her moral perceptions, that until now she had been ignorant of its extent and guiltiness. She scarcely wonders, when she dwells on all the past, at Esau's burning and murderous anger, though sudden fear again overtakes her at the remembrance of his threatening words ; words which have banished Jacob from his home, and rendered her the desolate being she is.

In the retrospect of her long life, there are some things to rejoice in, many for which to be thankful. As a maiden, she had been fair, lovely, and virtuous, the joy and pride of fond parents and brothers. As a wife, she had been faithful, and very happy, and able ever to retain a firm hold upon the conjugal affection which had gladdened her youth. But as a mother, how had she failed ! Yet was not the providence and prophecy of God the cause of her folly ? She could not so excuse herself. Had he, the Almighty One, any need of the sins and infirmities of his creatures, in order to accomplish his purposes ? Could he not have caused Jacob to inherit Abraham's priv-

ileges without her crooked and unjust course ? Humbled and heart-stricken, she bows in deep repentance, and accepts at his hands the bitter consequences. Henceforth, she must walk her path of earth alone. Her sons, who, in their infancy, had so gladdened her home, will cheer that home no more. Her husband, blind, imbecile, and helpless, can no longer share her joys, nor bear with her the burdens of life.

But duty is still hers. With meekness and love she will minister to the many wants of him who has loved her so long, and by her patience strive to expiate the only deceit of which she was ever guilty toward him ; and, to cheer her solitary days and nights, she will hide in her inmost heart the blessed consolation, that even as the Eternal needs not the faults of men to forward his designs, neither shall those faults be able to frustrate his gracious plans. Her shortcomings will not prevent her son from inheriting the covenant blessings, nor for a moment turn aside the current of divine love which is to flow through him to a guilty world.

We have drawn a picture from imagination of

the last scenes of Rebekah's life, in order more fully to learn the lesson it teaches. If we would often strive to bring before us the probable thoughts and feelings of Bible characters, and place ourselves in their circumstances, we should gain far clearer views of their excellences and faults.

8*

LEAH AND RACHEL.

Two sisters, dwelling under one roof, loving and beloved, careless of the future, which in its beauty and freshness, like an unclouded morning just opening upon them, gives no hint of the darkness which may gather, or the tempests which may lower before the day is done ; entering a path which seems to lead through smiling and flowery fields on to some land of perfect peace ; but which will, ere long, find the weary and heart-stricken traveller harassed with unforeseen obstacles, entangled in inextricable thickets, or plunged all unawares in some miry slough of Despond, — such are Leah and Rachel, when on the sacred page they are first presented to our view. We regard them with deep and growing interest as we study the peculiarities of their differing characters, and glean from the slight mementoes which are left us, some connected history of their more widely differing destinies.

Rachel comes ever first to our thoughts, in her

witching beauty, the pet and darling of her selfish father — the life of the house — the spoiled child — the blithesome, light-hearted young shepherdess, who could so charm and entrance her staid and quiet cousin, that the seven years through which he toiled to win her, consumed by heat and chilled by frost, seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had to her ; and who, although eighty years had passed over his head before he claimed her for his bride, and youthful impulse and enthusiasm had long since fled, and romance had expired, still cherished for her through life an affection such as we find not in any page of fiction. But, notwithstanding her beauty and attractiveness, Rachel was, as we have said, a spoiled child, and she took this character into her married life, to her own sorrow, and the evident unhappiness of those around her. Wayward, and accustomed to be petted, she could ill endure to be crossed even by Providence. Envious of her sister, and impatient under any delay in the fulfilment of her wishes, she manifested a spirit which brought severe rebuke even from the lips of her devoted husband. Months and years were

spent by her in a tumult of discordant feelings, and in resorting to unnatural and crooked policy in order to accomplish her end. Far from proving amiable and lovely as a wife, she seems to have been to Jacob often a severe trial ; yet, he ever loved her, even as in the first days of fondness. But at length the disciplinary process which she needed seems to have had its designed effect, for the time came when he who sits as the refiner saw fit to visit her, and bestow the long-sought blessing. Happy beyond measure in the birth of a son, she offers her tribute of gratitude, and we must believe, though little further light shines on her character, that the fresh fountain of a mother's love, newly opened in her heart, flowed to the purifying of all selfishness and jealousy, and to the harmonizing of all discordant elements in the hitherto distracted family. Would not her heart feel a new tie to her husband, the father of her child ? Would she not turn again, with self-reproach and reviving love, to her long-neglected and abused sister, the once-cherished companion of her childhood, now that she could understand and sympathize in her maternal joys

and cares? Would not her affection be called forth as never before toward each childish member of the household, invested with an interest hitherto unknown, and doubly dear, because as truly the children of her husband as her own cherished nursling? That she was a happier and better woman after Joseph's birth, we cannot doubt, and we feel sure that a peace never before experienced by them settled on Jacob's family.

But complete happiness abides not long a tenant in any circle on earth. That which had been to Rachel the strongest desire of life, became, at length, in its fulfilment, the occasion of her death. She who had felt that the birth of a son could bring only joy, who had said “Give me children or else I die,” saw a day, when, with feeble, expiring breath, she named her second born “Benoni — the son of my sorrow,” and departed from earth, leaving her two helpless ones to want a mother’s care and love, and perhaps wishing as fervently as before that they had never been born, or that she might take them with her to the unseen world.

She was taken from evil to come. The fear-

ful trial which threatened to bring Jacob's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, she was spared. Her memory was most fondly cherished. Her children — how tenderly were they regarded because they were hers, and what can exceed in pathos and beauty her husband's last uttered remembrance of his early love, when bestowing on Joseph's sons the forfeited birthright of Reuben, and, wishing to bind their hearts to the land of Canaan, he reminds them that it was the place of her death, and that her bones reposed beneath its soil.

One question ever comes to us as we read of Rachel's death. Did Leah's sorrowing heart find repose at length in the assurance of her husband's love? When Jacob was left alone, and comfortless, did he turn to her for consolation, who had so long endured alone for his sake? We do not know. From her childhood, Leah appears to have borne the yoke. Although she was the eldest in her father's house, yet Rachel's superior beauty and vivacity had cast her into the shade, and doubtless rendered her, as in all such cases, reserved and silent, and less attractive than she

would otherwise have been. Yet, there beamed ever from her eyes a loving tenderness, which betrayed an unusually affectionate heart, and lent a charm to her whole deportment which mere regularity of features cannot give. Oh! how cruelly was that affectionate, clinging heart doomed to suffer! How bitter was her lot! Forced to act a deceitful and most revolting part, her feelings of delicacy and maidenly propriety outraged by an unfeeling father, she became clandestinely the wife of one who sought her not, whom she knew to be wholly absorbed in love to another and fairer, but to whom she had unwittingly given the wealth of her own rich affections.

From her bridal day, she was a neglected, unloved wife. How must the sounds of joy have jarred on her spirit and mocked her heart during the week of festivity which in the East celebrates a marriage. And yearning to be loved as she loved herself, what anguish must she have felt when another week gave to her husband's arms one who she knew must entirely supplant her, and blot out every hope of winning, even by the utmost devotion, the heart which would now, more

than ever, turn from her ! He might be kind to her, as he doubtless was. Many tokens of regard he would bestow upon her, and treat her with the respect due the oldest and first wedded wife ; but love her, he could not ; she knew he could not. The cares, the toils, the suffering which marriage brings, shall be hers, but the rich compensation, the pure, overflowing, confiding love, which cheers and lightens care, and which woman will be a living martyr to win — this she will never know.

But Leah, thus seemingly desolate and wretched, was not forsaken. The Eye that pondereth all hearts was a witness to her conflicts, and Almighty love came to her relief. A mother's joys were soon in store for her, and with the prospect came delightful thoughts of gratitude to God, and fond anticipations of brighter days. “ Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction ; now, therefore, my husband will love me.” Alas ! poor Leah ! She knew the important blessing promised in Abraham's covenant was a numerous seed, and she thought surely the birth of her son, so desirable an event, would win her a place in her husband's heart. This hope cheered every hour

of weariness and suffering, and sustained her in her agony, and when that was past, and tidings were borne to Jacob that he was a father, how eagerly she listened for his approaching footsteps — with what intense earnestness she scanned the face so dear, to learn that she had not suffered in vain ! Her babe was not a daughter, so lightly esteemed in Eastern countries. God, the God of his father, had bestowed the blessing, and it was a son she had to give. He could not turn coldly from her — he must love her now.

She was doomed to disappointment. A new grief weighed on her heart, and when her second son was given to her arms there was no hope in her words, but only a meek, subdued expression of love to Him who knew her sorrows, and had again appeared for her comfort. Again and again, sometimes hoping, sometimes desponding, but always in the spirit of earnest piety and a beautiful trust in God, she welcomed her children into the world. Years rolled on. She was still a neglected wife, but she was no longer unhappy nor lonely. A song of praise to the Lord was ever on her lips. Around her clustered smiling

little faces—soft hands smoothed her care-worn brow, and cooing, dove-like voices cheered her solitude, and called her “mother.” Six fair sons and a daughter grew up around her, and she had the consolation of knowing that distinguished honor was put upon her by Him who thus made her an instrument of fulfilling his covenant with her husband. So far as we know Leah’s character, it was extremely lovely. No repining or discontented words, no rebellious or wilful expressions, fell from her lips, no murmuring appears to have been in her heart. Once only the hidden conflict appears, when her sister asks a favor. “Is it a small matter that thou hast taken away my husband? And wouldst thou take away my son’s mandrakes also?” It was a revealing of deep sorrows, and it melted even Rachel’s heart.

Again the question returns: Did Jacob ever love her as she deserved to be loved? and again we must answer, we do not know. She lived many years, fulfilling the duties of a wife and mother, and reposed at last in the cave of Machpelah, beside Sarah and Rebekah, with whom she

has doubtless been thousands of years rejoicing in the perfect blessedness of that world where unrequited love is unknown — where the soul, with its increasing capacities for affection, is ever abundantly filled and satisfied, because its portion is infinite. “God only knows the love of God,” but they who have come up from earth, out of much tribulation, and have washed their robes and been made meet for heavenly fellowship, shall understand the blissful mystery of that union which alone is dearer and more intimate than the hallowed unions of earth. They who are bound in marriage ties here “are of twain made one flesh ;” but “he that is joined to the Lord is *one spirit.*”

How gracious and condescending to human infirmities is God our heavenly Father ! How ready to gratify every reasonable desire ! If any who read these pages are conscious of earnest and unsatisfied wishes, let them, not in Rachel’s fretful and rebellious spirit, but in meek and patient trust, with thanksgiving, make their request known unto him. He has written, “The desire of the righteous shall be granted.”

If any neglected, lonely wife reads with tearful eyes the story of Leah's sorrow, let her turn to Leah's Almighty Friend for comfort, and learn to say, though again and again disappointed, " Still will I praise the Lord." Let her, with childlike submission, receive her cup at his hands, and in the faithful discharge of duty wait her appointed time and lot. She shall not labor and wait in vain. If her heart finds no place of repose in his who should cherish and love her, she shall surely understand at length what is that perfect peace in which they are kept whose minds are stayed on the infinite God. If he has bestowed on her the inestimable blessing of children, the richest solace earth affords is already hers ; let her not indulge gloomy and repining thoughts, but let her bend all her energies to the task of training immortal minds, who, if she is faithful, shall rise up and call her blessed, and praise God for her care and instructions.

In Jacob's family were two other mothers of whom we have not spoken. They were servants ; little is said of them ; yet they were cared for by Jehovah, and their children were sons who were

at length heads of four tribes in Israel. Every mother, however humble her position in earthly society, is the immediate care of God, and is doing his work. She knows not what mighty results depend on her fidelity in performing her allotted task. Let her train every child as if she heard a voice from heaven saying, Take this child and nurse it for me. She shall not lose her reward.

9*

JOCHEBED.

THE hours of day are fast numbering in a humble home in Goshen, a house which has gathered members enough to render it ever cheerful, and garnered sacred ties and rich affections sufficient to insure the greatest earthly bliss, but over which the hand of tyranny has cast shadows deeper and more dense than the gloom of night descending around. The father, with aching limbs and a heavy heart, has returned from his toil under the cruel task-master, whom he, like his companions, has vainly striven to satisfy, and with slow, desponding tread enters the dwelling, lays aside his outer garments, and seats himself moodily in the nearest corner. Two bright faces, however, come to welcome him, and their childish prattle and words of affection soon bring comfort to his heart, and drive the look of discontent from his brow, and he joins in their merry glee, until suddenly he is attracted by the pale countenance of his wife, as with languid, and evi-

dently painful step, she performs the slight labors necessary for the preparation of the evening meal. One glance is sufficient to assure him that sterner trials than any yet endured await them, and the time draws nigh. Gently he puts his children from him, and rises to give her such assistance as he may. No words are spoken, the meal is soon taken, the little ones go to their quiet rest, needed aid is stealthily summoned, the wife and mother bows herself to her anguish. No sound escapes her lips ; a fear more terrible than any throes she can experience shuts her mouth and stifles every groan. Even the feeble cry which announces the birth of her son brings no joy, no relief, only a greater dread. O, hush him ! do not let him cry ; father, friends, if ye have any pity, let not his voice be heard. Before another setting sun, the little delicate form which is so precious, so dear, may furnish food for the cruel crocodile. Place him by her side, let her soothe him ; she best understands the art.

Alas, what terrors now daily thicken about that mother's path ! How fails her heart at every approaching tread. How earnestly she portrays

to the sorrowing Miriam the danger of betraying the carefully-kept secret. How constantly she watches lest the little Aaron should with lisp-ing tongue tell how he loves his baby brother. How wildly she hastens at the first sound of that baby voice, when he awakes from sleep ; how agonized she is until she succeeds in soothing and quieting her charge. All around she hears shrieks and struggles and despairing groans from her sisters in affliction, and misses one and another fair infant form from the homes they had blessed, and she folds her loved one closer to her aching breast, and wonders if she could endure to have him thus torn from her. She suffers, and yet there is in her heart a confidence that all will in the end be well. Not an unfounded hope, not a vague, undefined persuasion, but a faith in an Almighty Friend. Her husband has from time to time spoken words of cheer, and encouraged, by reminding her of Abraham's God, and his promises made in days long past and handed down to them. They know that a great and illustrious person is to be born of Abraham's seed, and may not their son be one of those

through whom he shall descend ? Jochebed looks upon the wondrous beauty of her babe, his strangely noble mien, and, sent by Him who knows all the avenues to the human heart, come comfort and strength, and she gives herself to new efforts for the preservation of the child.

Three weary, leaden-footed months have passed. Her boy has gained in strength and comeliness, and the mother's heart clings to him with an intensity of love proportioned to the anxiety she has felt, and the high hopes she sustains for him. But the time has come when she can conceal him no longer. The vigilance of their ruthless enemies is becoming too keen, and their strict search will soon inevitably discover her treasure. Who can imagine her distress, as the conviction forces itself upon her ? In her extremity she again betakes herself to the promises and love of Jehovah, and reassures her fainting heart. Suddenly, in the hour of meditation and of deep darkness, a peradventure is suggested to her mind.

Behold her now busily engaged in what is evidently a most absorbing work. From the banks

of the Nile she has procured the “thirsty papyrus,” and the necessary pitch is at hand. With skilful art she constructs a basket-like cradle. Watch the variations of her countenance as with the greatest care she secures every chink and seam, and again and again examines, to be sure that it is perfectly impervious to water, and sufficiently strong for its purpose. Anxiety, sadness, desperation are there, and then the lighting up of some stern resolve, and then a gleam of hope, a faint courage; then, again, the workings of almost unendurable grief and torturing fear. Anon, the brow is calmed, and the compressed lips relax, and holy, sublime faith gains the mastery over all the conflicting feelings called forth by her strange employment. Her task is ended! all that maternal tenderness could dictate is done to render the frail vessel comfortable; and, taking her babe fondly in her arms, with one hasty caress she lays him, in his rosy sleep, within the little ark. Upon her emotions, as she carries him from her home, and takes her last look on his cherub face, and leaves him among the weeds at the water’s edge, we

cannot dwell. A confidence in God so noble as to be remembered and recorded centuries after, by an inspired apostle, and to place her, in the estimate of him who dictated the sacred page, among those "of whom the world was not worthy," sustained her in that fearful hour. She has used all the means within her reach to save him, and leaving the little Miriam to watch his fate at a distance, she returns to her desolate home.

* * . * *

That night found Jochebed no longer sorrowing and fearful, but a blessed and happy mother, far happier than she had ever before been. No harrowing anxieties now, no trembling lest the cry of pain or crowing laugh of joy should betray her child. No caution, no fear. Let who will step hastily by her dwelling, her cheek need not blanch. She is doing the bidding of a princess, and receiving wages at her hand for nursing that fair boy. Well may the stern-featured, stony-hearted men who delight in deeds of blood, stand awed and subdued before the rare beauty of that baby face, and wonder at the intelligence

and dignity which are stamped on that childish brow. Not in vain is he thus endowed by his Maker. They harm him not. The mother need not tremble. A peace unknown before descends on the little household. Oppression still grinds. The father still toils. All around is suffering and war ; but under that humble roof Jehovah is praised with a gladness which must be felt to be expressed.

No words of praise has Moses bestowed on his mother, nor does a single line inform us of the nature of her instructions to him in the days when he was once more all her own, before "she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son." But every trait of that noble character which fitted him for the station he afterwards filled ; the meekness which made him the friend of God, with whom he spoke face to face, as he has never to any other being of mortal birth ; the faith which refused the wealth and honors and titles of Egypt, and preferred affliction and contempt with the people of God ; the self-renunciation, and devotion to the glory of Jehovah, which led him to plead for the stiff-

necked children of Israel when he would destroy them and make of his faithful servant a great nation ; the dauntless courage, the unwavering rectitude,—all bear witness to the instructions of his early years, which “the learning of the Egyptians,” and the fascinations of a court, had no power to obliterate. The mother of Israel’s great law-giver needs no more enduring monument than the lofty virtues of her son.

Faith ! my dear friends, such faith as they exercised whose history the Bible records, O that it might animate us ! We are not called to lay our children on the altar of sacrifice, nor leave them to be whelmed in the waters of the Nile ; but every mother has trials to pass through, and duties to perform, which require the same faith that Abraham and Jochebed possessed, if she wishes to see her children standing at last faultless before the throne. The more we study and come to understand the wonders God has wrought for those who have trusted in him, the more earnestly our prayer ascends, “Lord, increase our faith.”

THE MOTHERS OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT.

"A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is passed, and as a watch in the night."

IT often appears to us, as we study the sacred page, and as we contemplate the movements of the kingdom of grace, in these latter days, that the work of God in the salvation of the race of man makes slow and difficult progress, and we wonder at the tardiness and seeming want of success of any project which has God for its author and executor. But we forget that, although he is God all-sufficient, and can without doubt perform the whole good pleasure of his will — though all events are under his control, it nevertheless pleases him to work by means and instrumentalities. Seldom does he "speak and it is done," as when the light first shone on earth. Ordinarily, if he will accomplish anything in the material world, he brings it about in the order of its natural development. If his dealings are with men as moral beings, he works

according to the laws of mind which himself ordained.

It was now more than four hundred years since God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and made the covenant that through him and his descendants all the nations of the earth should be blessed, and since he first revealed his purpose of acquainting the world with his own glorious character and will. Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, had long slept in the cave of Machpelah. Where were their descendants, and in what circumstances ? Had the covenant been in any particular fulfilled ? Was the gracious purpose fast being accomplished ? Not to human view. The children of the patriarchs, far from dwelling in the land of Canaan, the blessed and favored people of Jehovah, were a nation of slaves, debased by the most abject and cruel bondage, ignorant of even the name of their father's God ; though remembering him as the God of Abraham, yet comprehending nothing concerning him save the bare fact of his existence among many other deities ; and having a vague, uncertain belief in the traditional promise of his appearance in

their behalf, and their ultimate inheritance of the country of Canaan. Some, indeed, among them seem to have had clearer ideas and a more intelligent faith, but the mass of the people were buried in the depths of ignorance and misery. Around them the Egyptians, and all the other dwellers upon earth, were given up to the grossest idolatry. What foothold had the kingdom of grace as yet gained in the world ? What had the Almighty been doing to advance it during these rolling centuries ?

If we ask reverently, we ask well, and perhaps a satisfactory answer may be given. In commencing and carrying forward the scheme of man's redemption, a mighty work had first to be done, which we seldom think of, and little appreciate,—a work preliminary to the first revelation of himself among the nations. It was not merely with man's ignorance of the only living, and true, and holy God, which grace had to contend, but with a state of mind and heart so utterly debased as to be incapable of receiving or comprehending for a moment any idea of such a Being. A dense and almost impenetrable darkness brooded over

the earth. But this was not all; the visual organs, long accustomed only to darkness, were weakened and destroyed. Before light could benefit, the blind must be healed. Before God could reveal himself to men, their sunken, sensual souls must be elevated and purified, and made capable of understanding the revelation. This was a slow and tedious process. For its furtherance he must first train and educate, from the commencement of their existence, a people, who, being themselves thus elevated and enabled to receive the truths he would communicate, should hold them up, from generation to generation, before their benighted fellow-men, and win all at length to know and obey.

This, then, was the work which Jehovah accomplished during the long years which seem so fruitless to us. He had been training and preparing this peculiar people. Understanding well man's entire nature, and what means to use wherewith to meet his ends, he had been steadily employing those means, until the destined result was at last attained. In the Hebrew people, a race singularly differing from all the other inhab-

itants of earth, whom he had bound to each other by a common descent and common sufferings, and whom he would bind to himself by ties of the most ardent gratitude and love ; who had never worshipped idols, and who, though entirely ignorant of his true nature, were yet in a state to receive and reverence the God who would deliver them from their bitter afflictions ; in this race, which he had thus brought down from his servant Abraham, and prepared for his purpose by "the process slow of years," he had the instrumentality which he needed, and without which he could not carry forward his gracious work.

But some will ask, "What has all this to do with the Mothers of Israel ?" Much. Among the instruments which he employs, God never forgets nor undervalues those who usher into being, and to whom are committed, by his own ordination, the most susceptible years of all the men who live. It was through these mothers that the keenest pangs of the terrible discipline, through which the nation passed, was felt. Fathers, and husbands, and brothers, were not so deeply outraged, so heart-stricken, by any toil

or hardship imposed on themselves, as by the cruel mandate which so crushed their daughters, wives, and sisters. Among their draughts of gall and wormwood none were so bitter as that which brought groans of anguish from every wife who had the prospect of becoming a mother, turned into a curse what they had ever esteemed the richest of blessings, and made the feeble cry of infancy — always before a note of joy — the most distressing sound that could fall on parental ears.

And when the day of deliverance came, whose joy so great, whose gratitude to God so intense, whose obligations so binding, as those of the mothers of the nation ? What instruments could be found so effective as they would prove in the work of making known the glory of their Deliverer ? In what strange scenes had they learned his might and goodness ! One by one they had seen the idols of Egypt overwhelmed in ruin and shown to be worthless, and their awe and admiration were constantly increased. But when the hour of retribution came, when Almighty vengeance repaid into the bosom of every Egyptian

family the thrilling anguish which his people had suffered, when he stood forth to shield them, and destroy their foes, their awe and admiration turned to love and high devotion. In permitting them to be so afflicted, in avenging their wrongs, and in the gratitude he thus called forth, the far-seeing, all-wise Jehovah laid a foundation for the character of every Hebrew child, and of the whole Hebrew nation, through all coming ages ; a character most marked and peculiar, and retaining its distinctive features under all circumstances and in every clime. From that day to this, every Israelitish mother, in commemoration of those scenes in Egypt, consecrates her first-born child to the God of their deliverance, and through all their generations the command to rehearse in the ears of their family his mighty deeds, has been obeyed, and has accomplished what he designed. Among his first broken sentences the Hebrew child utters the solemn truth, first fully understood in Egypt, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,” and from his tender infancy he hears constantly repeated, — “By strength of hand the Lord

brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beasts ; therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix.”

Thus have the griefs of those mothers whose children were given to the devouring crocodile, and the groans of their oppressors, echoed upon all the shores of time, even to these distant days, ever bringing with them to the ear solemn and awful revelations of the power and avenging justice of Israel’s God. The unfolding ages have shown him to us, as we have been by degrees prepared to receive him, not merely manifested in these sublime attributes, but in the person of Jesus Christ, our redeeming Saviour, our Advocate and Friend, rejoicing to own the title which the pious soul delights to give him, and which looks back through the long vista of rites and ceremonies to that awful night when the hope of Egypt fell, and the chosen people were spared — “ *The first-born among many brethren.*”

Nor shall these reverberations cease. Through coming years, and amid the crash of earth's dissolution, shall be heard from the eternal hills the immortal song of the *church of the first-born* which are written in heaven, chanting of deliverance from a worse than Egyptian bondage, and of a more glorious Passover than any celebrated by Jewish service.

The mothers of this favored land may learn a deeply interesting lesson from this page of the divine word, and especially from that command of God with regard to the instruction of every Hebrew child. Rehearse in the ears of your child, Christian mother, the story of His mighty deeds. From day to day store the young mind with fresh knowledge of the wonders God hath wrought. Call forth his childish admiration; teach him to bow with reverence before the great name of his Maker. But, more than all, tell him the story of redeeming love. Let the life of the infant Saviour, the story of the boy of twelve years in the temple, the love of the man Christ Jesus, be repeated in his ears, until they are familiar as household words. Remember the Jew-

ish mothers, and the result of their unwearied teachings. With them, nothing is second to this command of their God, and their children never lose the impress of maternal instructions. Their strangely uniform character is a powerful comment on the wisdom of Jehovah in directing them to be thus taught.

ZIPPORAH.

In the mountainous and wild region which lies around Horeb and Sinai, were found, in the days of that Pharaoh whose court was the home of Israel's law-giver, many descendants of Abraham, children of one of the sons which Keturah bore him in his old age. We know little of them ; but here and there on the sacred page they are mentioned, and we gain brief glimpses of their character and of the estimation in which they were held by Jehovah. Like all the other nations of the time, they were mostly idolaters, against whom he threatened vengeance for their inventions and abominations. But among them were found some families who evidently retained a knowledge of Abraham's God, and who, although they did not offer him a pure worship, "seem, nevertheless, to have been imbued with sentiments of piety, and intended to serve him so far as they were acquainted with his character and requirements." For these, from time to

time, a consecrated priest stood before the altar, offering sacrifices which were, doubtless, accepted in heaven, since sincerity prompted and the spirit of true obedience animated the worshippers.

In the family of this priest, who was also a prince among his people, a stranger was at one time found, who had suddenly appeared in Midian, and, for a slight kindness shown to certain members of the household, had been invited to sojourn with them, and make one of the domestic circle. He was an object of daily increasing interest to all around him. Whence had he come ? Why was he thus apparently friendless and alone ? Wherefore was his countenance sad and thoughtful, and his heart evidently so far away from present scenes ? Seven sisters dwelt beneath the paternal roof, and we can readily imagine the eagerness with which they discussed these questions and watched the many interviews between him and their father, which seemed of a most important character. The result was not long kept from them. Moses was henceforth to perform what had been their daily task, and, as his reward, was to sustain the relation of son,

husband, and brother, in the little circle. Ziporah, whether willingly or reluctantly we are not told, became the wife of the silent man ; nor has he, in the record which he has left, given us any account of those forty years of quiet domestic life, which he spent watching his flocks amid the mountain solitudes, and in intercourse with the “priest of Midian,” and during which, taught of that God who chose him before all other men, as a familiar friend, he was daily learning lessons of mighty wisdom, and gaining that surpassing excellence of character which has made his name immortal. Was the wife whom he had chosen, the worthy daughter of her father and a fit companion for such a husband ? Did they take sweet counsel together, and could she share his noble thoughts ? Did she listen with tearful eyes to his account of the woes of his people, and rejoice with him in view of the glorious scenes of deliverance which he anticipated ? Did she appreciate the sublime beauties which so captivated and enthralled his soul as he pored over the pages of that wonderful poem which portrays the afflictions of the man of Uz ? Did

she worship and love the God of their common father with the same humility and faith? We cannot answer one of the many questions which arise in our minds. All we know is, that Zipporah was Moses' wife, and the mother of Moses' sons, and we feel that hers was a favored lot, and involuntarily yield her the respect which her station would demand.

Silently the appointed years sped. The great historian found in them no event, bearing upon the interests of the kingdom of God, worthy of note, and our gleanings are small. At their close he was again found in close consultation with Jethro, and with his consent, and in obedience to the divine mandate, the exile once more turned his steps toward the land of his birth. Zipporah and their sons, with asses and attendants, accompanied him, and their journey was apparently prosperous until near its close, when a strange and startling providence arrested them.* An alarming disease seized upon Gershom, the eldest son, and at the same time intimations not

* The construction put upon this passage is taken from Bush's Commentary on Exodus, which see.

to be mistaken convinced his parents that it was sent in token of divine displeasure for long-neglected duty. God's eye is ever on his children, and though he is forbearing, he will not forever spare the chastening rod, if they live on in disobedience to his commands. Both Moses and Zipporah knew what was the appointed seal of God's covenant with Abraham, and we cannot understand why they so long deferred including their children in that covenant. We do not know how many times conscience may have rebuked them, nor what privileges they forfeited, but we are sure they were not blessed as faithful servants are. Now there was no delaying longer. The proof of God's disapprobation was not to be mistaken, and they could not hesitate if they would preserve the life of their child. "There is, doubtless, something abhorrent to our ideas of propriety in a mother's performing this rite upon an adult son," for Gershom was at this time, probably, more than thirty years of age; but we must ever bear in mind that she was complying with "a divine requisition," and among a people, and in a state of society, whose sentiments and

usages were very different from ours. Her duty performed, she solemnly admonished Gershom that he was now espoused to the Lord by this significant rite, and that this bloody seal should ever remind him of the sacred relation. The very moment neglected obligations are cheerfully assumed, that moment does God smile upon his child. He accepts, and upbraids not: The frown which but now threatened precious life has fled, and his children rejoice in new found peace, and in that peculiar outflowing of tenderness, humility and love, which ever follows upon repentance, reparation and forgiveness.

For some reason, to us wholly inexplicable, Moses seems to have sent his family back to the home which they had just left, before reaching Egypt, and they resided with Jethro until the tribes, having passed through all the tribulations which had been prophesied for them, made their triumphant exodus from the land of bondage and encamped at the foot of Sinai. Jethro, who seems to have taken a deep interest in the mission of Moses, immediately on hearing of their arrival, took his daughter and her sons to rejoin

the husband and father from whom they had been long separated. Touching and delightful was the re^ünion, and we love to linger over the few days which Zipporah's father spent with her, in this their last interview on earth. The aged man listened with wonder and joy to the recital of all that Jehovah had wrought. He found his faith confirmed and his soul strengthened, and doubtless felt it a great privilege to leave his child among those who were so evidently under the protection of the Almighty, and before whom he constantly walked in the pillar of fire and cloud. With a father's care and love, he gave such counsel as he saw his son-in-law needed, and after uniting with the elders in solemn sacrifice and worship, in which he assumed his priestly office, he departed to his own land. We seem to see Zipporah, as with tearful eyes she watched his retreating footsteps, and felt that she should see her father's face no more on earth. Not without fearful struggles are the ties which bind a daughter to her parents sundered, though as a wife she cleaves to her husband, and strives, for his sake, to repress her tears and hide the an-

guish she cannot subdue. One comfort, however, remained to Zipporah. Soothingly fell on her ear the invitation of her husband to her brother, the companion of her childhood : “ We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you : come thou with us and we will do thee good ; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” Deprecatingly she doubtless looked upon him, as he answered, “ I will not go, but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred ;” and united in the urgent entreaty, “ Leave us not, I pray thee ; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.” Heartfelt joy shone in her countenance as he acquiesced and made preparation to accompany them ; and we are glad for her, and feel that with her husband and brother near, on whom to lean, she must have been cheered, and the bitterness of her final separation from home alleviated.

Feelings of personal joy or grief were soon, however, banished from her mind by the mighty wonders which were displayed in the desert, and

by the absorbing scenes which transpired while Israel received the law, and were prepared to pursue their way to Canaan. Of her after history we gather little, and the time of her death is not mentioned. One affliction, not uncommon in this evil world, fell to her lot. Her husband's family were unfriendly and unkind to her, and she was the occasion of their reproach and ridicule. But she was happy in being the wife of one meek above all the men upon the earth, and she was vindicated by God himself. What were her hopes in prospect of seeing the promised land, in common with all the nation, or whether she lived to hear the terrible command of God to Moses, "Avenge Israel of the Midianites," we do not know. The slaughter of her people may have caused her many a pang, and she probably went to her rest long before the weary forty years were ended. She has a name and a place on the sacred page, she was a wife and mother, and, though hers is a brief memorial, yet, if we have been led to study the word of God more earnestly, because we would fain learn more concerning her, that memorial is not useless.

THE MOTHERS OF ISRAEL AT HOREB.

WE beg those of our readers who have had the patience to follow us thus far in our study, now to open their Bibles, unsatisfied with the meagre thoughts which we are able to furnish, and, earnestly invoking the aid of that Spirit who indited the sacred pages, bend diligently to the work of ascertaining the real interest which we and all the mothers of earth have in the scenes which transpired at the foot of Horeb's holy mount. To the instructions there uttered, the mighty ones of every age, the founders of empires, statesmen, lawgivers, philanthropists, patriots, and wise men, have sought for their noblest conceptions, and their most beneficent regulations, and it would be impossible to estimate the influence of those instructions upon all the after history of the world. But if the Almighty there revealed himself as the God of kingdoms, the all-wise and infinitely good Ruler of men in a national capacity, not less did he make himself known as the

God of the family; and his will there made known, regulating the mutual relations of parents and children, has been at once the foundation and bulwark of all that has been excellent or trustworthy in family government from that day to this.

It is impossible, in the brief space allotted to us, that we should begin to give any adequate view of the subject which here opens before us, or follow out fully a single one of the many trains of thought to which it gives rise.

At Horeb, Jehovah, amid fire and smoke, and in that voice which so filled with terror all that heard, first inculcated the duty of filial piety on all the future generations of men. Filial piety! how much it implies. It stands at the head of the duties enjoined from man to man. It comes next in order to those which man owes to his Maker. It inculcates on the part of children toward their parents feelings akin to those which he has required toward himself, and far surpassing any which he demands toward any other human being. It speaks of reverence, of a love superior to ordinary affection, of unqualified submis-

sion and obedience. "Honor thy father and thy mother" is the solemn command, and the comments which infinite wisdom has made on it, scattered up and down on the pages of inspiration, throw light on its length and breadth, and on the heinous nature of the sin which is committed in its infringement. "Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father, and keep my Sabbaths; I am the Lord." In the Jewish law, a man who smote his neighbor must be smitten in return; but "he that smiteth father or mother shall be surely put to death." "He that curseth," or, as it more exactly reads, "he that disparages or speaks lightly of his parents, or uses contemptuous language to them, shall surely be put to death." "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastised him, will not hearken unto them, then shall his father and his mother lay hold of him and bring him to the elders of the city, and unto the gate of his place. And they shall say unto the elders of the city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice. And all the

men of the city shall stone him with stones that he die ; so shalt thou put away evil from among you, that all Israel shall hear and fear."

Still more fearful is the practical commentary upon this solemn command, given in Ezekiel 22 : 7, when Jehovah, in enumerating the crying sins which demanded his vengeance on the people, and brought upon them the terrible calamities of long captivity, says, "In thee have they set light by father and mother."

But some one will say, You profess to be speaking to parents, and this command is given to children. True, friend, but the duty required of children implies a corresponding duty on the part of parents. Who shall teach children to reverence that father and mother in whose character there is nothing to call forth such a sentiment ? " Though children are not absolved from the obligation of this commandment by the misconduct of their parents, yet, in the nature of things, it is impossible that they should yield the same hearty respect and veneration to the unworthy as to the worthy, nor does God require a child to pay an irrational honor to his parents. If his parents

are atheists, he cannot honor them as Christians. If they are prayerless and profane, he cannot honor them as religious. If they are worldly, avaricious, overreaching, unscrupulous as to veracity and honest dealing, he cannot honor them as exemplary, upright, conscientious and spiritually-minded."

If parents only say, like Eli, in feeble accents, "Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear. Why do ye such things?" they will not only have disobedient and irreverent children, but often, if not always, they will be made to understand that their sin is grievous in the sight of God, and he will say of each of them also, "I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile and *he restrained them not.*" "And therefore have I sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever."

Unto parents God has committed the child, in utter helplessness, weakness, and ignorance,—an unformed being. The power and the knowledge are theirs, and on their side is He, the al-

mighty and infinitely wise, with his Spirit and his laws and his promises. If they are faithful ; if from the first they realize their responsibility, and the advantages of their position, can the result be doubtful ? But they will not be faithful ; imperfection is stamped on all earthly character, and they will fail in this as in all other duties. What then ? Blessed be God, the Gospel has a provision for erring parents. If Sinai thunders, Calvary whispers peace. For men, as sinners, the righteousness of Christ prevails, and for sinners, as parents, not less shall it be found sufficient. Line and plummet can soon measure the extent of human perfection, but they cannot fathom the merit of that righteousness, which, when laid side by side with the most holy law, shows no deficiency. If, then, we find ourselves daily coming short of the terms of that covenant which God has made with us as parents, we need not despair of his fulfilling his part, for we can plead our Surety's work, and that is ever acceptable in his eyes, and answers all his demands.

Let not, however, the negligent and wilfully-

ignorant parent conclude that the spotless robe of the perfect Saviour will be thrown as a shield over his deficiencies and deformity. Let not those who have blindly and carelessly entered on parental duties, without endeavoring to ascertain the will of God and the requirements of his law, expect that the blessing of obedient and sanctified children will crown their days. Let not those who suffer their children to grow up around them like weeds, without religious culture or pruning, who demand no obedience, who command no reverence, who offer no earnest, ceaseless prayer, let them not suppose that the blessing of the God who spoke from Horeb will come upon their families. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" Not an iota has he abated from his law since that fearful day. Not less sinful in his eyes is disobedience to parents now, than when he commanded the rebellious son to be "stoned with stones until he died." Yet, how far below his standard are the ideas even of many Christian parents! "How different," says Wilberforce, "nay, in many respects, how contradictory, would be the two systems of mere morals, of

which the one should be formed from the commonly-received maxims of the Christian world, and the other from the study of the holy Scriptures ; ” and we are never more forcibly impressed with this difference than when we see it exemplified in this solemn subject.

The parents who stood at Horeb learned that God required them to train their children to implicit and uncompromising obedience, and he who closely studies the word of God can find no other or lighter requisition. How will the received opinions and customs of this age compare with the demand.

We ask our young friends, who may perchance glance over these pages, to pause a moment and consider : If capital punishment should now be inflicted on every disobedient child, how many rods of earth would be planted with the instruments of death ? If every city were doomed to destruction in which the majority of sons and daughters “ set light by father and mother,” how many would remain ? To every child living comes a voice, “ Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”

THE WIDOWED MOTHERS OF ISRAEL AT HOREB.

THERE is no path of duty appointed for man to tread, concerning which the Almighty has not expressed his will in terms so plain that the sincere inquirer may always hear a voice behind him saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it;" nor are there any relations of life, nor any human affections, which he has not constituted and bestowed, nor any disappointment of those affections for which he has not manifested a sympathy so sincere, that the desolate and heart-stricken may always say, "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."

Yet it is something difficult for us to realize, in our hours of darkness and despondency, that toward us personally and individually the great heart of Infinite Love yearns with tenderness and pity. Even if we can say, "Though clouds and darkness are round about him, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne," and can

acquiesce meekly in all his dispensations, and believe sincerely that they will work for our good, yet we often fail of the blessedness which might be ours, if we could be equally assured that, "*As a father pitieth his children, so doth the Lord pity them that fear him.*" This assurance only the faithful student of the Bible can feel, as the great truth gleams forth upon him from time to time, illumining "*dark affliction's midnight gloom*" with rays celestial, and furnishing balm for every wound, the balm of sympathy and love.

We often hear it said by those who even profess themselves Christians, and devout lovers of the sacred oracles, "*How can you read the book of Leviticus? What can you find in the dry details of the ceremonial law to detain you months in its study, and call forth such expressions of interest?*" Such will probably pass by this article when they find themselves invited again to Horeb. Turn back, friends. You are not the only ones who have excused themselves from a feast. And we, we will extend our invitation to others. On the by-ways and lanes they can be found; in every corner of this wide-spread earth

are some for whom our table is prepared. We leave the prosperous, the gay, the happy, and speak to the desolate, the widowed.

Dearly beloved, you who can look back to a day in your history over which no cloud lowered, when you wore the bridal wreath, and stood at the sacred altar, and laid your hand in a hand faithful and true, and pledged vows of love, and when hope smiled on all your future path ; but who have lived to see all you then deemed most precious, laid beneath the clods of the valley, and have exchanged buds of orange for the most intensely sable of earthly weeds ; you who once walked on your earthly journey in sweet companionship which brightened your days ; who were wont to lay your weary head every night on the faithful, “pillowing breast,” and there forget your woes and cares, but who are now *alone* ; you who trusted in manly counsel and guidance for your little ones, but who now shed bitter, unavailing tears in every emergency which reminds you that they are fatherless ; and, worse than all, you who had all your wants supplied by the loving, toiling husband and father, but have now to

contend single-handed with poverty ; come, sorrowing, widowed hearts, visit with us Horeb's holy mount. It is, indeed, a barren spot ; nevertheless it has blossoms of loveliness for you. Come in faith, and perchance the prophet's vision shall be yours ; peradventure, the "still small voice," which bade to rest the turmoil of his soul, shall soothe your griefs also. The words which are heard from its summit, as Jehovah gives to Moses his directions, have indeed to do with "meats and drinks and divers washings," yet, if you listen intently, you will now and then hear those, which, as the expression of your heavenly Father's heart, will amply repay the toil of the ascent. Draw near and hearken :

" Ye shall not afflict any widow nor fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword ; and your wives shall be widows, your children fatherless."

Will you not now be comforted ? "The Eternal makes your sorrows his own," and himself stands forth as your protector against every ill.

He speaks in your behalf to all around you. How fearfully stern the tones in which he bids them beware how they injure you ! How secure a refuge he affords you from every form of human aggression on your rights or happiness ! Would any wrest from you by fraud or violence your little store of earthly goods ; appeal to him. Does the tongue of slander seek to take from you your good name ; tell him your grief, as you would have told it to the husband whose honor was concerned to defend you. In whatever way your fellow-creatures distress you, or try your patience, or disturb your peace, his ear is ever open to hear your complaint, his word is pledged to redress the wrong.

Listen again !

“ When thou cuttest down thy harvest in thy field, and hast forgotten thy sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it, but it shall be for the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the works of thy hands.”

Not only has Jehovah undertaken to secure you against evils which might be inflicted by

human means, but he also designs to guard you against pinching want and poverty. If his will is done you will not suffer. He does not indeed command ravens to feed you, but he does lay his injunctions on every one of his children to provide for you, if you are in need. Those who obey him, and wish to please him, will be always ready to aid you for his sake. He bids every Israelite bring a certain portion of his possessions to furnish the table of the Lord, and assuring you that he considers you his own, and will perform the part of husband and father for you, at that table, and in his own house, he provides for you ever a place. In the tithes of wine, corn and oil, the firstlings of the herds and flocks, in all that is to be devoted to the service of the Lord, you have your share.

“At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year and lay it up within the gates. And the Levite, because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord thy God

may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest."

Do you sorrowfully say that no such table is now spread ? But He who thus provided, still lives, and is the same as then. The silver and the gold are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, and he ruleth all things by the word of his power. They that trust in him shall never be confounded.

"Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless, nor take the widow's raiment to pledge." Why ? Because they have no earthly friend to redeem the latter, or plead for the former. Weak and unguarded, they are exposed to all these evils, but He, the Eternal, takes them under his own especial care ; and instead of compelling them to depend on the insecure tenure of man's compassion, or even justice, institutes laws for their benefit, the disobedience of which is sin against himself."

Scattered through all the sacred volume are words which, equally with those we have quoted, speak forth Jehovah's interest in the helpless. "Leave thy fatherless children to me," he said,

by his prophet Jeremiah, at a time when misery, desolation, and destruction, were falling on Judea and her sons for their awful impiety. "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive ; and let thy widows trust in me." "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation."

O, do we receive the full import of these soul-cheering words ? Lone, solitary one ! who hidest in thy heart a grief which, untasted, cannot be understood ; there is a Being, sitting on the circle of the heavens, who knows every pang thou endurest. He formed thee susceptible of the love which thou hast felt and enjoyed ; himself ordained the tie which bound thee. He, better than any other, comprehends thy loss. Dost thou doubt. Study faithfully his word ; obey his voice ; yield thy heart to him, and trust him implicitly. He will prove himself able to bless thee in thine inmost soul. The avenues to that soul are all open to him, and he can cause such gentle, soothing influences to flow in upon thee as shall make thee "sing even as in the days of thy youth."

Fatherless child ! whose heart fails thee when thou dost miss from every familiar place the guide of thy youth ; faint not nor be discouraged, though the way is rough, and the voice that ever spoke tenderly to thee is silent. Thou hast a Father in heaven ; and he who calls himself such, understands better than thou what is implied in that sacred name. Tell him thy woes and wants.

“ Thou art as much his care, as if beside
Nor man nor angel lived in heaven or earth.”

NAOMI AND RUTH.

It would be only presumption in us to attempt giving, in any other than the beautifully simple words of Scripture, the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law. The narration is inimitable, and needs nothing to make it stand out like a picture before the mind. Suffice it, then, that now we attend only to the lessons which may be gathered from it, and endeavor to profit by them through all our coming lives. Nor let any think the lessons afforded by these four short chapters few or easily acted upon, though they may be soon comprehended. They will amply repay earnest study and persevering practice.

The first thing which wins our admiration is Ruth's faith. She had been educated in the degrading worship of Chemosh, the supreme deity of Moab. Probably no conception of the one living God had been formed in her mind until her acquaintance with the Jewish youth, the son of Elimelech and Naomi. How long she

had the happiness of a wife we are not informed. We know it was only a few years. But during that period she had learned to put such confidence in Jehovah, that she was willing to forsake country and friends, even the home of her childhood and beloved parents, and go forth with her mother-in-law to strange scenes, and willing to brave penury and vicissitude, that she might be numbered among his people. Firmly she adhered to her resolution. The entreaties of Naomi — the thought of her mother — the prospects which might await her in her own land — even the retreating form of Orphah — nothing had power to prevail over her desire to see Canaan and unite in the worship of her husband's God. "The Lord recompense thy work," said Boaz to her, "and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." He is not unfaithful, and that reward was made sure. "Of the life that now is" the promise speaks, and it was fulfilled to her. Of an undying, honorable name it says nothing, but that is also awarded her. "Upon a monument which has already outlasted thrones

and empires, and which shall endure until there be a new heaven and a new earth — upon the front page of the New Testament is inscribed the name of RUTH. Of her came David — of her came a long line of illustrious and good men — of her came Christ.”

Why will we not learn, why will we not daily and constantly act upon the truth that implicit faith is pleasing to God? “None of them that trust in him shall be desolate.”

There is a fund of instruction, also, in the few glimpses which we gain of the intercourse of Naomi and Ruth, as they journey on, and after their arrival in Canaan. How does the law of love dictate and pervade every word and action! Naomi had once been an honored wife and mother in Judah, and far above the reach of want. But in “the days when the judges ruled,” those days during which “every man did that which was right in his own eyes,” her husband had deserted his people; and now on her return she was probably penniless, her inheritance sold until the year of jubilee, and she in her old age, unable by her own efforts to gain a subsistence.

The poor in Israel were not forlorn, but it required genuine humility on Ruth's part, and a sincere love for her mother-in-law, to induce her to avail herself of the means provided. She hesitated not. It was "in the beginning of the barley harvest" that they came to Bethlehem, and as soon as they were settled, apparently in a small and humble tenement, she went forth to glean in some field after the reapers, not knowing how it would fare with her, but evidently feeling that all depended on her labors. The meeting of the mother and daughter at the close of that important day is touching indeed. The joy with which the aged Naomi greets her only solace, and the kind and motherly care with which she brings the remains of her own scanty meal, which she had laid aside ; her eager questions, and Ruth's cheerful replies as she lays down her burden and relates the pleasant events of the day — what gratitude to God, what dawning hopes, what a delightful spirit of love, appear through all ! And, as days pass, how tenderly does Naomi watch over the interests of her child, and how remarkable is the deference to

her wishes which ever animates Ruth! Even in the matter of her marriage,—a subject on which young people generally feel competent to judge for themselves,—she is governed entirely by her mother's directions. “All that thou sayest unto me I will do.” Said a young lady in our hearing, not long since, “When I am married I shall desire that my husband may have no father or mother.” This is not an unusual wish, nor is it uttered in all cases lightly and without reason. We know of a mother who would never consent that her only son should bring his wife to dwell under her roof, although she was entirely satisfied with his choice, and was constantly doing all in her power to promote their happiness. What were her reasons? She was a conscientious Christian and fond mother, but she would not risk their mutual happiness. She felt herself unable to bear the test, and she was unwilling to subject her children to it. Often do we hear expressions of pity bestowed on the young wife who is so “unfortunate” as to be compelled to live with her mother-in-law, and many are the sighs, and nods, and winks of gossip among the

mothers-in-law themselves over the trials which some of their number endure from their sons' wives. Why is all this? The supreme selfishness of our human nature must answer. Having a common love for one object, the mother for her son, the wife for her husband, they should be bound by strong ties, and their mutual interests should produce mutual kindness and sympathy; and this would always be the case if each were governed by the spirit of the Gospel. But, alas! love of self, rather than the pure love inculcated by Jesus Christ, most often rules. Brought together from different paths, unlike, it may be, in natural temperament, perhaps differing in opinion, the mother wishing to retain her wonted control over her son, the wife feeling hers the superior claim, there springs up a contest which is the fruitful source of unhappiness, and which mars many an otherwise fine character. Before us in memory's glass, as we write, sits one of a most fair and beautiful countenance, but over which hang dark clouds of care, and from the eyes drop slowly, bitter tears. She is what all around her would call a happy wife and mother.

Fortune smiles upon her, and the blessing of God abides by the hearth-stone. Her husband is a professing Christian, as is also his yet youthful-looking mother, and the wife herself. Beautiful children gambol around her, and look wonderfully in her face as they see those tears. What is the secret of her unhappiness ? She deems hers a very hard lot, and yet, if we rightly judge, could her sorrow be resolved to its elements, it would be found that the turmoil of her spirit is occasioned solely by the fact that she finds it hard to maintain her fancied rights, her desired superiority over her husband and servants, because of the presence of her calm, firm, dignified mother-in-law, whose very lips seem chiselled to indicate that they speak only to be obeyed. What would be the result if the tender, considerate love of Naomi, and the yielding spirit of Ruth were introduced to the bosom of each ?

We cannot leave this record of Holy Writ without commenting, also, on the remarkable state of society which existed in Bethlehem in those far distant days. When Naomi returned after an absence of ten years,— an absence

which to many might have seemed very culpable, — with what enthusiastic greetings was she received. “The whole city was moved.” It made no difference that she “went out full, but had returned empty ;” nor did they stop to consider that “the Lord had testified against her.” The truest sympathy was manifested for her, and for the stranger who had loved her and clung to her. In her sorrow they clustered around to comfort her, and when the bright reverse gave her again an honored name and “a restorer of her life” in her young grandson, they were eager to testify their joy. The apostolic injunction, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep,” seems to have been strictly obeyed in Bethlehem. The distinctions of society, although as marked apparently as in our own time, seem not to have caused either unhappiness or the slightest approach to unkind or unchristian feeling. Witness the greeting between Boaz and the reapers on his harvest field. “And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.” Boaz was

"a mighty man of wealth ;" he had his hired workmen around him, and in the same field was found the poor "Moabitish damsel," gleaning here and there the scattered ears, her only dependence. Yet we find them all sitting together in the hut which was erected for shelter, and eating together the parched grain which was provided for the noon's refreshment, while Boaz enters into a conversation with Ruth which indicates his truly noble and generous character, and speaks words which are like balm to the sorrowing spirit. "Thou hast comforted me and spoken to the heart of thy handmaid," she said as she rose to leave the tent, and felt herself no longer a stranger, since one so excellent and so exalted in station appreciated and sympathized with her. We see little in these Gospel days and in this favored land which will compare with the genuine kindness which breathes in every word and act recorded in the book of Ruth.

But the most surprising revelation is made in the account which follows the scene in the tent. What exalted principle, what respect for woman, what noble virtue must have characterized

those among whom a mother could send her daughter at night to perform the part assigned to Ruth, apparently without a fear of evil, and receive her again, not only unharmed, but understood, honored, and wedded, by the man to whom she was sent, and that notwithstanding her foreign birth and dependent situation, and fettered with the condition that her first-born son must bear the name, and be considered the child of a dead man !

We have friends who will fasten their faith on the New Testament only, and can see nothing in the Old akin to it in precept or spirit. We commend to them the Book of Ruth.

H A N N A H.

IMAGINATION can picture no more animating scenes than those which were presented to the beholder at the seasons of the year when Judea poured forth her inhabitants in crowds to attend the solemn festivals appointed by Jehovah, and observed with punctilious exactness by the people. Our present study leads us to contemplate one of these scenes.

From some remote town on the borders of Gentile territory the onward movement commences. A few families having finished all their preparations, close the door of their simple home, and with glowing faces and hopeful steps begin their march. They are soon joined by others, and again by new reinforcements. Every town, as they pass, replenishes their ranks, until, as they approach Shiloh, they are increased to a mighty multitude. It is a time of joy. Songs and shouts rend the air, and unwonted gladness reigns. All ages and conditions are here, and every varie-

ty of human form and face. Let us draw near to one family group. There is something more than ordinarily interesting in their appearance. The father has a noble mien as he walks on, conversing cheerfully with his children, answering their eager questions, and pointing out the objects of deepest import to a Jew as they draw near the Tabernacle. The children are light-hearted and gay, but the mother's countenance does not please us. We feel instinctively that she is not worthy of her husband ; and especially is there an expression wholly incongruous with this hour of harmony and rejoicing. While we look, she lingers behind her family, and speaks to one, who, with slow step and downcast looks, walks meekly on, and seems as if she pondered some deep grief. Will she whisper a word of comfort in the ear of the sorrowful ? Ah, no ! A mocking smile is on her lips, which utter taunting words, and she glances maliciously round, winking to her neighbors to notice how she can humble the spirit of one who is less favored than herself. "What would you give now to see a son of yours holding the father's hand, or a daughter tripping gladly along by his

side? Where are your children, Hannah? You surely could not have left them behind to miss all this pleasure? Perhaps they have strayed among the company? Would it not be well to summon them, that they may hear the father's instructions, and join in the song which we shall all sing as we draw near to Shiloh?" Cruel words! and they do their work. Like barbed arrows, they stick fast in the sore heart of this injured one. Her head sinks, but she utters no reply. She only draws nearer to her husband, and walks more closely in his footsteps.

* * * * *

The night has passed, and a cloudless sun looks down on the assembled thousands of Israel. Elkanah has presented his offering at the Tabernacle, and has now gathered his family to the feast in the tent. As is his wont, he gives to each a portion, and hilarity presides at the board. The animated scene around them — the white tents stretching as far as the eye can reach — the sound of innumerable voices — the meeting with friends — all conspire to make every heart overflow, and the well-spread table invites to new

expressions of satisfaction and delight. But here, also, as on the journey, one heart is sad. At Elkanah's right hand sits Hannah, her plate filled by the hand of love with "a worthy portion ;" but it stands untasted before her. Her husband is troubled. He has watched her struggles for self-control, and seen her vain endeavors to eat and be happy like those around her ; and, divining in part the cause of her sorrow, he tenderly strives to comfort her. "Hannah, why wepest thou ? and why eatest thou not ? and why is thy heart grieved ? Am I not better to thee than ten sons ?" That voice of sympathy and compassion is too much. She rises and leaves the tent to calm in solitude, as best she may, her bosom's strife. Why must she be thus afflicted ? Severe, indeed, and bitter are the elements which are mingled in her cup. Jehovah has judged her. She has been taught to believe that those who are childless are so because of his just displeasure. Her fellow-creatures also despise her ; her neighbors look suspiciously upon her. Wherefore should it be thus ? She wanders slowly, and with breaking

heart, towards the Tabernacle. The aged Eli sits by one of the posts of the door as she enters the sacred inclosure, but she heeds him not. She withdraws to a quiet spot, and finds, at last, a refuge. She kneels, and the long pent-up sorrow has now its way ; she “pours out her soul before the Lord.” Happy, though sorrowful, Hannah ! She has learned one lesson of which the prosperous know nothing ; she has learned to confide in her Maker, as she could in no other friend. It were useless to go to her husband with the oft-told trouble. He is ever fond and kind ; but, though she is childless, he is not, and he cannot appreciate the extent of her grief. All that human sympathy can do, he will do, but human sympathy cannot be perfect. It were worse than useless to tell him of Peninnah’s taunts and reproaches. It would be wicked, and bring upon her Heaven’s just wrath, if she did aught to mar the peace of a happy family. No ; there is no earthly ear into which she can “pour out her soul.” But here her tears may flow unrestrained, and she need leave nothing unsaid.

O Thou, who hidest the sorrowing soul under

the shadow of thy wings — who art witness to the tears which must be hidden from all other eyes — who dost listen patiently to the sighs and groans which can be breathed in no other presence — to whom are freely told the griefs which the dearest earthly friend cannot comprehend, — Thou, who upbraidest not — who understandest and dost appreciate perfectly the woes under which the stricken soul sways like a reed in the tempest, and whose infinite love and sympathy reach to the deepest recesses of the heart — unto whom none ever appealed in vain — God of all grace and consolation, blessed are they who put their trust in thee.

Long and earnest is Hannah's communion with her God ; and, as she pleads her cause with humility, and penitence, and love, she feels her burdened heart grow lighter. Hope springs up where was only despair, and a new life spreads itself before her ; even the hard thoughts which she had harbored towards Peninnah had melted as she knelt in that holy presence. The love of the eternal has bathed her spirit in its blessed flood ; and grief, and selfishness, and envy, have

alike been washed away. Strengthened with might by the spirit of the Lord, she puts forth a vigorous faith ; and, taking hold on the covenant faithfulness of Jehovah, she makes a solemn vow. The turmoil within is hushed. She rises and goes forth like one who is prepared for any trial, who is endued with strength by a mighty though unseen power, and sustained by a love which has none of the imperfect and unsatisfying elements that must always mingle with the purest earthly affection. Meek, confiding, and gentle as ever, she is yet not the same. She meets reproach even from the high priest himself with calmness. She returns to her husband and his family, no longer shrinking and bowed down ; “she eats, and her countenance is no more sad.”

Another morning dawns. Hannah has obtained her husband’s sanction to the vow which she made in her anguish. Elkanah and his household rise early and worship before the Lord, and return to their house in Ramah.



A year passes, another and another, but Hannah is not found among the multitude going up

to Shiloh. Has she, the pious and devoted one, become indifferent to the service of Jehovah, or, have the reproaches and taunts of Peninnah become too intolerable in the presence of her neighbors, so that she remains at home for peace ? No. Reproach will harm her no longer. As the company departs, she stands with smiling countenance looking upon their preparations, and in her arms a fair son ; and her parting words to her husband are, — “I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide forever.”

* * * * *

Will she really leave him ? Will she consent to part from her treasure and joy — her only one ? What a blessing he has been to her ! Seven years of peace and overflowing happiness has that little one purchased for her burdened and distracted spirit. Can she return to Ramah without him, to solitude and loneliness, uncheered by his winning ways and childish prattle ? Surely this is a sorrow which will wring her heart as never before. Not so. There she

stands again on the spot where she once knelt, and wept, and vowed, but no tears fall now from her eyes, no grief is in her tones. She has come to fulfil her vow, “to lend her son to the Lord as long as he liveth.” Again she prays as she is about parting from him. What a prayer! a song of exultation rather. Listen to its sublime import. “My heart rejoiceth in the Lord ; mine horn is exalted in the Lord.” How did we wrong thee, Hannah! We said thy son had purchased peace and joy for thee. Our low, selfish, doting hearts had not soared to the heights of thy lofty devotion. We deemed thee such an one as ourselves. In the gift, truly thou hast found comfort ; but the giver is he in whom thou hast delighted, and therefore thou canst so readily restore what he lent thee, on the conditions of thy vow. The Lord thy God has been, and is still to be, thy portion, and thou fearest not to leave thy precious one in his house. We thought to hear a wail from thee, but we were among the foolish. Thy soul is filled with the beauty and glory of the Lord, and thou hast not a word of sadness now. Thou leavest thy lamb

among wolves— thy consecrated one with the “ sons of Belial ” — yet thou tremblest not. Who shall guide his childish feet in wisdom’s ways when thou art far away ? What hinders that he shall look on vice till it become familiar, and he be even like those around him ? The old man is no fit protector for him. Does not thy heart fear ? “ O, woman, great is thy faith ! ”

Come hither, ye who would learn a lesson of wisdom ; ponder this record of the sacred word. Hannah returned to Ramah. She became the mother of sons and daughters ; and yearly, as she went with her husband to Shiloh, she carried to her first-born, a coat wrought by maternal love, and rejoiced to see him growing before the Lord. How long she did this we are not told. We have searched in vain for a word or hint that she lived to see the excellence and greatness of the son whom she “ asked of God.” The only clue which we can find is, that Samuel’s house was in Ramah, the home of his parents ; and we wish to think he lived there to be with them ; and we hope his mother’s eyes looked on the altar which he built there unto the Lord, and that her heart

was gladdened by witnessing the proofs of his wisdom and grace, and the favor with which the Almighty regarded him.

But though we know little of Hannah, she, being many thousand years “dead, yet speaketh.” Come hither, ye who are tempest-tossed on a sea of vexations. Learn from her how to gain the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. Come, ye who feel that God hath judged you, and that you suffer affliction from his displeasure. Learn that you should draw nearer to him, instead of departing from him. Come with Hannah to his very courts. “Pour out your soul” before him; keep back none of your griefs; confess your sins; offer your vows; multiply your prayers; rise not till you, also, can go forth with a countenance no more sad. He is “the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.” Come hither, ye who long to know how your children may assuredly be the Lord’s. Strive to enter into the spirit of Hannah’s vow, remembering, meantime, all it implied as she afterwards fulfilled it. Appreciate, if you can, her love and devotion to her God; and when you can so

entirely consecrate your all to him, be assured he will care for what is his own, and none shall be able to pluck it out of his hand. Come hither, ye who are called to part with your treasures ; listen to Hannah's song, as she gives up her only son, to call him hers no more ; listen, till you feel your heart joining also in the lofty anthem, and you forget all selfish grief, as she did, in the contemplation of his glories who is the portion of the soul. “*My heart rejoiceth in the Lord.*” Alas! alas! how does even the Christian heart, which has professed to be satisfied with God, and content with his holy will, often depart from him, and “provoke him to jealousy” with many idols! Inordinate affection for some earthly object absorbs the soul which vowed to love him supremely. In its undisguised excess, it says to the beloved object, “Give me your heart ; Jehovah must be your salvation, but let me be your happiness. A portion of your time, your attention, your service, he must have ; but your daily, hourly thoughts, your dreams, your feelings, let them all be of me — of mine.” O for such a love as she pos-

sessed ! We should not then love our children less, but more, far more than now, and with a better, happier love ; a love from which all needless anxiety would flee ; a perfect love, casting out fear.

Ye who feel that death to your loved ones would not so distress you as the fear of leaving them among baleful influences ; who tremble in view of the evil that is in the world ; remember where Hannah left, apparently without a misgiving, her gentle child. With Eli—who could not even train his own sons in the fear of the Lord—with those sons who made themselves vile, and caused Israel to transgress, she left him *with the Lord*. “ Go ye and do likewise,” and remember, also, he is the God of the whole earth.

ICHABOD'S MOTHER.

“Strength is born
In the deep silence of long-suffering hearts,
Not amidst joy.”

THE noblest characters the world knows are those who have been trained in the school of affliction. They only who walk in the fiery furnace are counted worthy the companionship of the Son of God. The modes of their discipline are various, as are their circumstances and peculiar traits, but in one form or other stern trials have proved them all. They partake of the holiness of the Lord, because they have first endured the chastening of his love. They are filled with righteousness, because they have known the pangs of spiritual hunger and the extremity of thirst. They abound, because they have been empty. They are heavenly-minded, because they have first learned, in the bitterness of their spirits, how unsatisfying is earth. They are firmly anchored by faith, because frequent tempests and threatened shipwreck have taught

them their need. The Master himself was made perfect through suffering, and with his baptism must they who would follow him closely, be baptized.

While Hannah was undergoing at Ramah the discipline which wrought in her such noble qualities, there dwelt in Shiloh one of kindred spirit, who was called to endure even severer tests, inasmuch as that which should have constituted her happiness was evermore the bitterest ingredient in her cup; what might have been her purest joys became her greatest griefs. She was a wife, but only in name. Of the serenity and bliss which attend on true wedded love she was deprived. Her bridal pillow was early planted with thorns, which henceforth forbade all peace. She was a mother, but her children were to be partakers of their father's shame, disgraced, and doomed to early death or lives of wickedness and woe. She seemingly enjoyed abundant privileges; but her trials as a child of God were deeper than all others. She dwelt on sacred ground; but, alas! herein lay the secret of her sorrow. Had her home been among the thousands in the

outer camps, it had not been so sadly desecrated. Her husband was the High Priest's son, and daily performed the priest's duty among holy things. Had he been a humble member of Dan or Naph-tali, his crimes had not been so heinous. She lived under the shadow of the tabernacle ; had her abode been farther from the sacred enclosure, she had not been daily witness to the Heaven-daring deeds which made men abhor the offering of the Lord, and called for vengeance on her nearest and dearest. Her food was constantly supplied from the sacred offerings ; had it been procured in ordinary ways, she had not been a partaker with those who committed sacrilege.

No trifling vexations, no light sorrows were hers ; and, as might be expected, her virtues bore their proportion to the purifying process to which she was subjected. Disappointed in her earthly hopes, she clung to her God, and fastened her expectations on him. Humiliated in her human relations, she aspired to nothing henceforth but his honor and glory. Wounded in heart, her wealth of love despised, lonely, deserted, she sought in him the portion of her soul,

and her lacerated affections found repose and satisfaction, without the fear of change, in his unchanging love.

It is often so ordered, in the providence of God, that those who have borne the yoke in their youth, live to see days of comparative quietude and exemption from trouble. Hannah, after the birth of Samuel, appears to have passed the remainder of her life in peace and prosperity. But the nameless woman whose memorial we record had no respite. Her life was a life of endurance, and she was cut off in the midst of her days by a most fearful and agonizing stroke.

Israel was as usual at war with the Philistines. The army had pitched beside Ebenezer, "And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel ; and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines." Alarmed and distressed by this defeat, the Israelites, vainly imagining that wherever the ark of God was, there he would be, also, with his favoring presence, sent up to Shiloh to bring from thence the sacred symbol. With great pomp and solemnity it was borne by the Priests and Levites, and

tumultuous was the rejoicing as it entered the camp; but no account is given of the feelings of those who remained near the deserted tabernacle. Did the aged Eli forebode that the awful event which should signal the fulfilment of prophetic woe against his family was about to befall? Did the abused wife dream that she should behold no more her husband's face? We know not what of personal apprehension mingled with their trouble; but we do know that with trembling hearts these faithful servants of God awaited tidings of the ark of his covenant. How portentous soever might be the cloud which hung over their own happiness, they deemed it of small importance in comparison with the honor of Jehovah. The messenger came, but who shall portray the scene when he rendered his tidings!

* * * * *

In a darkened chamber, whither death, clothed in unwonted horrors, has suddenly come for the fourth victim of that doomed family, lies the subject of our meditations, panting under his iron grasp. The afflictions of her life are now con-

summated. The husband of her youth—his follies and faults against her now all forgotten in the bitter thought that *he is dead*—has gone unrepentant to the bar of God, to give account of his priesthood ; her venerable father-in-law alone, with no friend to cheer his dying agonies, has also departed from earth ; her people are defeated in battle, and, worse than all, the ark of God is fallen into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, who doubtless glory as if Dagon had conquered the invincible Jehovah. What to her are the pangs and throes under which her tortured body labors ? She heeds them not. Pitying friends endeavor to rouse her from her dying lethargy, by the most glad tidings a Hebrew woman could learn : “Fear not ; for thou hast borne a son !” But she answers not. Shorter and shorter grows her breath, nearer and nearer she approaches the eternal shore. But she is a mother ; and, though every other tie is sundered, and she is dying of the wounds which the cruel breaking of those heart-strings has caused, she feels one cord drawing her to her new-born child, and asks that he may be brought. It is

too much! Why was he born? No cheering thought comes with his presence. Nor joy nor honor are in store for him. "Call him Ichabod" (without glory), she gasps in feeble accents; "for the glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken." A moment more, and her freed spirit is in His open presence, who she deemed was forever departed from her people.

* * * * *

Christian friend,—you who are walking through desert places, and perhaps fainting under the heavy hand of God,—let not your heart fail you. Shrink not back from the path, though it seem beset with thorns. Some good is in store for you. Affliction, indeed, is not for the present joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. If, like the mother of Ichabod, you learn to forsake the turbid waters of earth for the Fountain of eternal love,—if you make the Lord your portion,—you will not in the end be the loser, though wave on wave roll over you and strip you of every other joy. No, not even if, at length, your sun shall set in clouds impenetrable to mortal

vision. A glorious, cloudless morning lies beyond, and you shall be forever satisfied with Him who has chosen you in the furnace of affliction.

“Then rouse thee from desponding sleep,
Nor by the wayside lingering weep,
Nor fear to seek Him farther in the wild,
Whose love can turn earth’s worst and least
Into a conqueror’s royal feast :
Thou wilt not be untrue, thou shalt not be beguiled.”

THE MOTHER OF SAMSON.

IN the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Judges is recorded the short but suggestive story which is our present Bible lesson. Horeb is long since left behind. The evil generation, who forty years tried the patience of Jehovah, have fallen in the wilderness, and their successors are now in possession of the promised land. Moses, and Joshua, and Caleb, have gone to their rest, and Israel, bereft of their counsel, follow wise or evil advices, as a wayward fancy may dictate, and receive a corresponding recompense at the hands of their God. The children proved in no respect wiser or more obedient than their fathers. Again and again “they forsook the Lord, and served the idols of the Canaanites, and in wrath he gave them up to their enemies.” Often, in pity, he raised up for them deliverers, who would lead them for a time in better paths ; “but when the judge was dead, they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following

other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them : they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way ; ” and therefore were they often, for long, tedious years, in bondage to the various nations which God had left in the land, “ to prove them whether they would walk in his ways.” It was during one of these seasons of trouble that the subject of our study is mentioned. She was the wife of Manoah, a citizen of Zorah, of the tribe of Dan. Of her previous history, and the events of her after life, we know nothing. He who beholdeth all things that are done under the sun, and readeth all hearts, had marked her out as the instrument wherewith he would work to get glory to himself ; and, however little known to others, he deemed her worthy of this distinguished honor, — worthy to receive a direct communication from himself. Of her character nothing is said ; but we gather that she was a self-denying, obedient child of God.

It is not necessary that we should detail every incident of those interviews with the angel Jehovah, which the mother of Samson was permitted

to enjoy. Take your Bible, friend, and read for yourself, in words more befitting than we can use; and, as you rise from the perusal, if the true spirit of a Christian reigns in your heart, you will perhaps exclaim, “O, that the Lord would come to me also, and tell me how I shall order my children, that so they may be the subjects of his grace, and instruments of his will!” If you meditate deeply while you read, perhaps you will conclude that, in his directions to this mother, our heavenly Father has revealed to us wonderful and important things, which may answer us instead of direct communications from himself, and which, if heeded and obeyed, will secure to us great peace and satisfaction. Bear in mind that he who speaks is our Creator,—that all the wonders of the human frame are perfectly familiar to him, and that he knows far more than earthly skill and science have ever been able to ascertain, or even hint at, concerning the relations which himself ordained. He comes to Manoah’s wife with these words:—“Now, therefore, beware, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing. For, lo!

thou shall conceive and bear a son ; and no razor shall come on his head : for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb." Can you discern in this only an allusion to Jewish customs and ceremonies, long since obsolete, and in no way interesting to us, except as a matter of history ? Can you not rather see gleaming out a golden rule which all would be blessed in following ? To us, in this history, Jehovah says, " Mother, whatever you wish your child to be, that must you also in all respects be yourself." Samson is to be consecrated to God by the most solemn of vows all the days of his life, and the conditions of that vow his mother is commanded to fulfil, from the moment that she is conscious of his existence, until he is weaned, a period of four years at least, according to the custom of her time.

These thoughts introduce to us a theme on which volumes have been written and spoken. Men of deep research and profound judgment have been ready to say to all the parents of earth, " Whatever ye are, such will also your children prove always, and in every particular, to be ; "

and there are not wanting multitudes of facts to strengthen and confirm the position. In certain aspects of it, it is assuredly true, since the principal characteristics of the race remain from age to age the same. Nor is it disproved by what seem at first adverse facts; for although children seem in physical and intellectual constitution often the direct opposite of their parents, yet a close study into the history of families may only prove, that if unlike those parents in general character, they have nevertheless inherited that particular phase, which governed the period from which they date their existence. No person bears through life precisely the same dispositions, or is at all times equally under the same influences, or governed by the same motives. The gentle and amiable by nature, may come into circumstances which shall induce unwonted irritability and ill-humor; the irascible and passionate, surrounded, in some favored time, by all that heart can wish, may seem as lovely as though no evil tempers had ever deformed them; and the children who shall be the offspring of these episodes in life, may bear indeed a character differ-

ing wholly from the usual character of their parents, but altogether corresponding to the brief and unusual state which ruled their hour of beginning life. So is it also in physical constitution. The feeble and sickly have sometimes intervals of health, and the robust see months of languor and disease. Hence, perhaps, the differences which are observable many times in the children of the same family with regard to health and natural vigor.

We cannot enter into the subject. It is wide and extended as human nature itself. It is also, apart from the gospel of God's grace, a very discouraging subject to the parent who contemplates it with seriousness, and with an earnest desire to ascertain the path of duty. "How useless," we may be tempted to exclaim, "any attempt to gain an end which is so uncertain as the securing any given constitution, either of body or mind, for my children! To-day I am in health, full of cheerfulness and hope; a year hence I may be broken and infirm, a prey to depressing thoughts and melancholy forebodings. My mind is now vigorous and active; who knows how soon the

material shall subject the intellectual, and clog every nobler faculty ? What will it suffice that to-day I feel myself controlled by good motives, and swayed by just principles, and possessed of a well-balanced character, since, in some evil hour, influences wholly unexpected may gain the ascendancy, and I be so unlike my present self that pitying friends can only wonder and whisper, How changed ! and enemies shall glory in my fall ? No. It is vain to strive after certainty in this world of change and vicissitude, since none of us can tell what himself shall be on the morrow. Do what I will, moreover, my child can only inherit a sinful nature." In the midst of gloomy thoughts like these, we turn to the story of Samson's mother, and hear Jehovah directing her to walk before him in the spirit of consecration, which is to be the life-long spirit of her son. He surely intimates that the child's character begins with, and depends upon, that of the mother. A ray of light and encouragement dawns upon us. True, we are fickle and changeable, and subject to vicissitude ; but he, our God, is far above all these shifting scenes, and all the

varying circumstances of this mortal life are under his control, he can turn the hearts of men as he will ; his counsel shall stand. True, we are transgressors like our first father, partakers of his fallen nature, and inheritors of the curse ; but “ where sin abounds grace does much more abound,” and “ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” For all the evils under which we groan, the Gospel has a remedy, and we have faith that in spite of all obstacles and difficulties, our Saviour will yet present us, as individuals, faultless before the throne. Why may not our faith take a still higher flight ? There are given to us exceeding great and precious promises. The Holy Spirit, first of all, shall be given to all who ask. They who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled. He has never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain. There are, on almost every page of the sacred word, these precious promises. By them you are encouraged daily in your onward struggle, Christian friend. What shall hinder you now from taking them to your heart as a mother with the same faith ? If God is able

to secure your soul against all evil influences,—yes, even against the arch enemy himself,—and if he has made the character of your child to depend upon your own in any degree, why may you not plead the promises of his word with double power, when your prayers ascend not merely for yourself, but for another immortal being whom he has so intimately associated with you? You are accustomed daily to seek from him holy influences; you pray that you may grow in grace and knowledge, and be kept from the evil that is in the world, and from dishonoring your Saviour. Can you not offer these same petitions as a mother, and beg all these blessings on behalf of your child, who is to take character from you? Can you not consecrate yourself in a peculiarly solemn manner to the Lord, and, viewing the thousand influences which may affect you, pray to be kept from all which would be adverse to the best good of the precious soul to be intrusted to you; and believe, by all you know of your heavenly Father, and of his plan of grace, that you will be accepted and your petitions answered? And then can you not *act* upon that faith? De-

siring your child to be a man of prayer, will you not, during the years in which you are acting directly on him, give yourself much to prayer? Hoping that he may not be slothful, but an active and diligent servant of his Lord, will you not give your earnest soul and busy hands to the work which you find to do? Wishing him to be gentle and lovely, will you not strive to clothe yourself with meekness? In short, will you not cultivate every characteristic that is desirable for the devoted Christian, in order, that, at least, your child may enter on life with every possible advantage which you can give him? And since a sane mind, and rightly-moving heart, are greatly dependent on a sound body, will you not study to be yourself, by temperance and moderation, and self-denial and activity, in the most perfect health which you can by any effort gain?

Who does not believe that if all Christian mothers would thus believe and act, most blessed results would be secured? The subject appeals to fathers also, and equal responsibility rests upon them.

Some will doubtless be ready to say, "This

would require us to live in the spirit a Nazarite's vow all the time. You have drawn for us a plan of life which is difficult to follow, and demands all our vigilance, constant striving, and unwearied labors." True, friends ; but the end to be gained is worth the cost, and you have " God all-sufficient " for your helper.

RIZPAH.

IN order fully to understand the subject of our present study, we must return upon the track, to the days of Joshua, before Israel had wholly entered upon the possession of the promised land. The tribes were encamped at Gilgal to keep the passover, and from thence, by the direction of Jehovah, they made incursions upon the surrounding inhabitants. Jericho and Ai had been taken, and the fear of these formidable Hebrews, and their mighty God, had fallen upon the hearts of the nations and stricken them almost to hopelessness. Feeling that a last effort to save themselves and their homes must be made, they banded together, and resolved to defend their rights, and to put to proof the combined power of their deities. One clan, however, despairing of success by any such means, having heard that the utter extirpation of the Canaanites was determined upon, resorted to stratagem, and thus secured their safety in the midst of the general ruin.

“They did work wilyly,” says the sacred record, “and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles old, and rent, and bound up ; and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them ; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy. And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country, now therefore make ye a league with us.” At first the Israelites seem to have suspected trickery ; but when the supposed ambassadors produced their mouldy bread, and declared that it was taken hot from the oven on the morning of their departure from their own country ; and that their wine bottles were new, now so shrunk and torn ; and pointed to their shoes and garments, quite worn out by the length of the journey ; and told their pitiful story ; and in their humility stooped to any terms if they might only be permitted to make a covenant ; Joshua and his elders were completely deceived, and, without stopping to ask counsel of the Lord, “they made peace with them, and made a league with them to let them live.”

The Lord abhors treachery, and although his people had greatly erred in this act, and although these Hivites were among the nations whom he had commanded them to destroy, yet, since a covenant had been made with them, it must be kept on peril of his stern displeasure and severe judgments. Only three days elapsed before the Israelites discovered that the crafty ambassadors were their near neighbors, and were called upon to come to their defence against the other inhabitants of the land, who, having heard of the transaction at Gilgal, had gathered together to smite their principal city, Gibeon, and destroy them because they had made peace with Joshua. Before the walls of that mighty city, and in behalf of these idolaters, because Jehovah would have his people keep faith with those to whom they had vowed, was fought that memorable battle, the like of which was never known before or since, when, to aid the cause, the laws of Nature were suspended upon human intercession — when Joshua said, “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon.” “So the sun

stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day."

The tribes gained their inheritance, and their enemies were mostly driven out of the land, but in their midst ever dwelt the Gibeonites, safe from molestation, though the menial services of the tabernacle were performed by them, because of the deceit by which they purchased their lives, and they were contented to be thus reduced to perpetual bondage, so they might escape the doom of their neighbors.

Years passed on, and vicissitudes came to the Israelites of one kind and another. Sometimes they were victorious in their battles and peaceful among themselves ; and, again, they fled before enemies or were embroiled in civil dissensions. Ever, above, caring for them, and bringing them safely on through all,—instructing, guiding, and disciplining,—sat on his throne, their mighty invisible King. They demanded an earthly monarch, and in judgment he granted their desire. *In judgment*, and miserable in many ways, were the results of his reign. Among his other evil acts not recorded, but alluded to in the history, was

one of cruel treachery to the Gibeonites. "It would seem that Saul viewed their possessions with a covetous eye, as affording him the means of rewarding his adherents, and of enriching his family, and hence, on some pretence or other, or without any pretence, he slew large numbers of them, and doubtless seized their possessions." In this wicked deed we gather that many of the Israelites, and the members of Saul's family in particular, had an active share, and were benefited by the spoils. The Almighty beheld and took cognizance, but no immediate retribution followed.

Towards the close of David's reign, however, for some unknown reason, the whole land was visited with a famine. Month after month it stalked abroad, and year after year, until three years of want had afflicted the chosen people. At the end of that time, David, having resorted to all possible means of providing food in vain, began to reflect that there was meaning in the visitation, and "sought the face of the Lord," to inquire why he was displeased with his people. The answer was explicit and terrible. "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he slew the

Gibeonites." Though men forget, the Lord does not. He will plead the cause of the oppressed sooner or later, and though his vengeance sleep long, yet will he reward, to those that deal treachery, seven-fold sorrow.

Driven by famine, and by the expressed will of Jehovah, David sent to ask of the injured people what should be done to satisfy their sense of justice. "And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house, neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul. And the king said, I will give them."

Dreadful days of blood! Fearful fiat! which though needful and just, yet invaded the sanctuary of home so gloomily. Sad world! in which the innocent so often bear the sins of the guilty, — when will thy groans, ever ascending into the ears of Almighty love, be heard, and bring release?

The sentence was executed. Two sons of Saul by Rizpah, his inferior wife, and five of Merab his eldest daughter, were delivered up and hung by the Gibeonites.

Who can imagine, much less portray, the mother's anguish when her noble sons were torn from her for such a doom! We do not know whether Merab was living to see that day of horror, but Rizpah felt the full force of the blow which blasted all her hopes. Her husband, the father of her sons, had gone forth to battle, and returned no more; her days of happiness and security had departed with his life, and now, all that remained of comfort, her precious children, must be put to a cruel death to satisfy the vengeance due to crimes not hers nor theirs. Wretched mother! a bitter lot indeed was thine. But the Lord had spoken, and there was no reprieve. To the very town where they had all dwelt under their father's roof, were these hapless ones dragged, and their bodies ignominiously exposed upon the wall until they should waste away; a custom utterly abhorrent to all humanity, and especially to the Hebrews, whose strongest desire might be

expressed in the words of the aged Barzillai,
“Let me die in mine own city, and be buried by
the grave of my father and mother.”

Behold now that lone and heart-broken mother, on the spot where day and night, week after week, and month after month, she may be found. Neither heat nor cold, distressing days nor fearful nights, the entreaties of friends, nor the weariness of watching, nor the horrifying exhibition of decaying humanity, could drive her from her post. Upon the sackcloth, which she had spread for herself upon the rock, she remained “from the beginning of the harvest until the rain dropped upon them out of heaven,” and suffered neither the birds of the air by day, nor the beasts of the field by night, to molest those precious remains. O, mother’s heart! of what heroism art thou capable! Before a scene like this, the bravest exploits of earth’s proudest heroes fade into dim insignificance. At this picture we can only gaze. Words wholly fail when we would comment on it. Of the agonies it reveals we cannot speak. There are lessons to be learned from it, and upon them we can ponder.

The value which the Lord our God sets upon truth is here displayed. He will have no swerving from the straight path of perfect fidelity to all engagements and covenants. Severe and awful appears his character as thus presented to us, and yet it is upon this very attribute that all our hopes rely. "He is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent." If he thus defends those who love him not, how safe and happy may his children rest!

The days in which Rizpah lived were dark and gloomy days. The words of Samuel to Agag may stand as their memorial: "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women." Let us be thankful that we see no such direful scenes, and let us act worthy of our higher lot. Let us remember, also, that there is a destruction of life more terrible even than that which Rizpah witnessed — the destruction of the soul. If the mother's love within us prompts us to half the care of the spiritual life of our children, which she bestowed on the decaying forms of her loved ones, He who

rewards faithfulness will not suffer us to labor
in vain.

HEAR what the desolate Rizpah said,
As on Gibeah's rocks she watched the dead.
The sons of Michal before her lay,
And her own fair children, dearer than they :
By a death of shame they all had died,
And were stretched on the bare rock, side by side.
And Rizpah, once the loveliest of all
That bloomed and smiled in the court of Saul,
All wasted with watching and famine now,
And scorched by the sun her haggard brow,
Sat mournfully guarding their corpses there,
And murmured a strange and solemn air ;
The low, heart-broken, and wailing strain
Of a mother that mourns her children slain :

“ I have made the crags my home, and spread
On their desert backs my sackcloth bed ;
I have eaten the bitter herb of the rocks,
And drunk the midnight dew in my locks ;
I have wept till I could not weep, and the pain
Of my burning eye-balls went to my brain.
Seven blackened corpses before me lie,
In the blaze of the sun and the winds of the sky.
I have watched them through the burning day,
And driven the vulture and raven away ;
And the cormorant wheeled in circles round,
Yet feared to alight on the guarded ground.

And when the shadows of twilight came,
I have seen the hyena's eyes of flame,
And heard at my side his stealthy tread,
But aye at my shout the savage fled :
And I threw the lighted brand to fright
The jackal and wolf that yelled in the night.

“ Ye were foully murdered, my hapless sons,
By the hands of wicked and cruel ones ;
Ye fell, in your fresh and blooming prime,
All innocent, for your father’s crime.

He sinned — but he paid the price of his guilt
When his blood by a nameless hand was spilt ;
When he strove with the heathen host in vain,
And fell with the flower of his people slain,
And the sceptre his children’s hands should sway
From his injured lineage passed away.

“ But I hoped that the cottage roof would be
A safe retreat for my sons and me ;
And that while they ripened to manhood fast,
They should wean my thoughts from the woes of the past.
And my bosom swelled with a mother’s pride,
As they stood in their beauty and strength by my side,
Tall like their sire, with the princely grace
Of his stately form, and the bloom of his face.

“ O, what an hour for a mother’s heart,
When the pitiless ruffians tore us apart !
When I clasped their knees and wept and prayed
And struggled and shrieked to Heaven for aid,

And clung to my sons with desperate strength,
Till the murderers loosed my hold at length,
And bore me breathless and faint aside,
In their iron arms, while my children died.
They died — and the mother that gave them birth
Is forbid to cover their bones with earth.

“ The barley-harvest was nodding white,
When my children died on the rocky height,
And the reapers were singing on hill and plain,
When I came to my task of sorrow and pain.
But now the season of rain is nigh,
The sun is dim in the thickening sky,
And the clouds in sullen darkness rest
Where he hides his light at the doors of the west.
I hear the howl of the wind that brings
The long drear storm on its heavy wings ;
But the howling wind and the driving rain
Will beat on my houseless head in vain :
I shall stay, from my murdered sons to scare
The beasts of the desert, and fowls of air.”

BRYANT.

BATHSHEBA.

A SUMMONS from the king! What can it mean? What can he know of her? She is, indeed, the wife of one of his “mighty men;” but though he highly esteems her husband, he can have no interest in her. She meditates. Her cheek pales. Can he have heard evil tidings from the distant city of the Ammonites, and would he break kindly to her news of her husband’s death? It cannot be. Why should he do this for her more than for hundreds of others in like trouble? Again she ponders, and now a crimson hue mounts to her temples—her fatal beauty! Away with the thought! it is shame to dwell upon it: would she wrong by so foul a suspicion the Lord’s anointed? She wearies herself with surmises, and all in vain. But there is the command, and she must be gone. The king’s will is absolute. Whatever that summons imports, “dumb acquiescence” is her

only part. She goes forth in her youth, beauty, and happiness. She returns—

* * * * *

Weeks pass, and behold another message; but this time it is the king who receives, and Bathsheba who sends. What is signified in those few words from a woman's hand, that can so unnerve him who "has his ten thousands slain"? It is now his turn to tremble and look pale. Yet a little while, and he,—the man after God's own heart, the chosen ruler of his people, the idol of the nation,—shall be proclaimed guilty of a heinous and abominable crime, and shall, according to the laws of the land, be subjected to an ignominous death. *He* ponders now. Would he had thought of all this before! but it is too late. The consequences of his ungoverned passion stare him in the face and well-nigh overwhelm him. Something must be done, and that speedily. He cannot have it thus. He has begun to fall, and the enemy of souls is, as ever, at hand to suggest the second false and ruinous step.

Another summons. A messenger from the king to Joab. "Send me Uriah the Hittite." It is peremptory; no reasons are given, and Joab does as he is bidden. Unsuspecting as loyal, Uriah hastens on his way, mindful only of duty, and is soon in the presence of his royal master, who, always kind, is now remarkably attentive to his wants and thoughtful of his interests. He inquires for the commander of his forces, and of the war, and how the people fare, and it would almost seem had recalled him only to speak kindly to him, and manifest his regard for the army, though he had not himself led them to battle.

But, though unsuspecting and deceived, the high-minded and faithful soldier cannot even unwittingly be made to answer the end for which he has been summoned, and after two days he returns to Joab, bearing a letter, of whose terrible contents he little dreams, and is happy in his ignorance.

Meantime Bathsheba has heard of his arrival in Jerusalem, and is momentarily expecting his appearance. Alas, that she should dread his coming! Alas, that she should shudder at every

sound of approaching footsteps ! How fearful is the change which has come over her since last she looked on his loved face ! He is her husband still, and she — she is his lawful, loving wife. Never was he so dear to her as now. Never did his noble character so win her admiration, as she contemplates all the scenes of her wedded life, and reviews the evidences of it in the past. How happy they have been ! What bliss has been hers in the enjoyment of his esteem and affection ! She is even now to him, in his absence, the one object of tender regard and constant thought. She knows how fondly he dwells on her love, and how precious to him is the beauty which first won him to her side. She is the “ewe lamb which he has nourished, which has drank from his own cup and lain in his bosom ;” she is his all. He has been long away ; the dangers of the battle-field have surrounded him, and now he is returned, alive, well ; her heart bounds ; she cannot wait till she shall see him ; yet how can she meet him ? Ah ! fatal remembrance, how bitterly it has recalled her from her vision of delight ! It is not true !

It cannot be true ! it is but a horrible dream ! Her heart is true. She would at any moment have died for him. The entire devotion of her warm nature is his. She had no willing part in that revolting crime. O ! must she suffer as if she had been an unfaithful wife ? Must she endure the anguish of seeing him turn coldly from her in some future day ? Must she now meet him, and have all her joy marred by that hateful secret ? Must she take part in deceiving him, in imposing upon him,—him, her noble, magnanimous, pure-minded husband ? O, wretched one ! was ever sorrow like hers ?

The day passes, and the night, and he comes not. Can he have suspected the truth ? Slowly the tedious hours go by, while she endures the racking tortures of suspense. The third day dawns, and with it come tidings that he has returned to Rabbah, and his words of whole-souled devotion to his duty and his God are repeated in her ears.—Faint not yet, strong heart ; a far more bitter cup is in store for thee.

* * * * *

Bathsheba is again a wife, the wife of a king,

and in her arms lies her first-born son. Terrible was the tempest which burst over her head, and her heart will never again know aught of the serene, untroubled happiness which once she knew. The storm has indeed lulled, but she sees the clouds gathering new blackness, and her stricken spirit shrinks and faints with foreboding fears. The little, innocent being which she holds fondly to her bosom, which seemed sent from Heaven to heal her wounds, lies panting in the grasp of fierce disease. She has sent for the king, and together they look upon the suffering one. Full well he knows, that miserable man, what mean those moans and piteous signs of distress, and what they betoken. He gazes on the wan, anguished features of his wife, as she bends over her child ; his thoughts revert hurriedly to her surpassing beauty when first he saw her ; a vision of the murdered Uriah flits before him ; the three victims of his guilt, and the message of Nathan, which he has just received—the stern words, “Thou art the man,”—bring a full and realizing sense of the depth to which he has fallen ; and, overwhelmed with remorse and

wretchedness, he leaves the chamber to give vent to his grief, to fast, and weep, and pray, in the vain hope of averting the threatened judgment.

Seven days of alternate hope and fear, of watching and care, have fled, and Bathsheba is childless. Another wave has rolled over her. God grant it be the last! Surely she has drained the cup of sorrow. She sits solitary and sad, bowed down with her weight of woes, her thoughts following ever the same weary track ; direful images present to her imagination ; her frame racked and trembling ; the heavens clothed in sackcloth, and life forever divested of happiness and delight. The king enters, and seats himself beside her. And if Bathsheba is changed, David is also from henceforth an altered man. “Broken in spirit by the consciousness of his deep sinfulness humbled ; in the eyes of his subjects, and his influence with them weakened by their knowledge of his crimes ; even his authority in his own household, and his claim to the reverence of his sons, relaxed by his loss of character ;” filled also with fearful anticipations of the future, which is shadowed by the

dark prophecy of Nathan; he is from this time wholly unlike what he has been in former days. “The balance of his character is broken. Still he is pious; but even his piety takes an altered aspect. Alas for him! The bird which once rose to heights unattained before by mortal pinion, filling the air with its joyful songs, now lies with maimed wing upon the ground, pouring forth its doleful cries to God.” He has scarcely begun to descend the declivity of life, yet he appears infirm and old. He is as one who goes down to the grave mourning. Thus does he seem to Bathsheba as he sits before her. But there is more in David, thus humble, contrite, and smitten, to win her sympathy, and even love, than there was in David the absolute, and, so far as she was concerned, tyrannical monarch, though surrounded with splendors, the favorite of God and man. A few days since, had he essayed the part of comforter, she would have felt her heart revolt; but now, repentant and forgiven, though not unpunished by Jehovah, she can listen without bitterness while he speaks of the mercy of the Lord which has suffered them both to live,

though the law could have required their death, and which sustains even while it chastises.

* * * * *

Another message—by the hand of the prophet to David and Bathsheba—a message of peace and tender consideration, a name for their new-born child, the gift to them from his own hand. “Call him Jedediah—beloved of the Lord.”

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!” In his dealings with his sinful children, how far are his ways above the ways of men! “As the heaven is high above the earth, *so great* is his mercy towards them that fear him.” He dealeth not with them after their sins; he rewardeth them not according to their iniquities; but, knowing their frame, remembering that they are dust, that a breath of temptation will carry them away, pitying them with a most tender compassion, he deals with them according to the everlasting, and abounding, and long-suffering love of his own mighty heart. Whenever those who have known him best, to whom he has manifested his grace

most richly, whom he has blessed with most abundant privileges, fall, in some evil hour, and without reason, upon the slightest cause, bring dishonor on his name, and give occasion to his enemies to blaspheme, and incur his just judgment, behold how he treats them. Upon the first sign of contrition, the first acknowledgment “I have sinned,” how prompt, how free, how full is the response, “The Lord also hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die !” No lingering resentment, no selfish reminding of his wounded honor, no thoughts but of love, warm, tender, self-forgetting love and pity for his sorrowing child. Even when he must resort to chastisement, “his strange work,” — when he must, for his great name’s sake, raise up for David evil out of his own house ; when he must, before the sun, and before all Israel, show his displeasure at sin ; with one hand he applies the rod, and with the other pours into the bleeding heart the balm of consolation, so pure, so free, that his children almost feel that they could never have understood his goodness but for the need of his severity. When, notwithstanding the earnest

prayer of the father, he smites the child of his shame, how soon does he return with a better gift,—a son of peace, who shall remind him only of days of contrition and the favor of God,—a Jedediah, who shall ever be a daily witness to his forgiving love!

And to those who suffer innocently from the crimes of others, how tender are the compassions of our heavenly Father! To the injured, afflicted Bathsheba is given the honor of being the mother of Israel's wisest, most mighty, and renowned king; and she is—by father and son, by the prophet of the Lord, by the aspirant to the throne, and by all around her—ever approached with that deference and confidence which her truly dignified character and gentle virtues, not less than her high station, demand. And while not a word of reproach is permitted to be left on record against her—on that monument of which we have before spoken, among mighty and worthy names, destined to stand when many of earth's wisest and greatest are forgotten, with the progenitors of our Lord and Saviour, is inscribed hers “who was the wife of Urias.”

ABIGAIL.

“ PROVIDENCE is the light of history and the soul of the world.” All times, all nations, all events are illumined by this light, and animated by this soul. Ceaselessly employed, forming fresh combinations, presenting new views, bringing about perpetually changing relations, all for the highest and noblest ends, Providence furnishes, even in its apparently trivial operations, a study most delightful and profound. When the ever-shifting drama descends, from the arena on which nations are the actors, to the humble sphere of private life, and presents only individual history, the every-day incidents of mortality, the conflicts, the hopes and fears, and discipline, through which one immortal soul may pass in its upward journey, still it is often of intense interest, and brings forth in its progress mighty and stirring issues. It links together in strange bonds the destinies of prince and peasant, of noble and unrefined, and unites the present to the future by

subtle and almost undistinguishable threads of interest and connection. Providence, in this world of sinners, works hand in hand with grace to restore fallen man to the lost image of his Maker, and, in accomplishing the mighty task, lays hold on all available things, and puts to its utmost use every circumstance and incident of life. With all-pervading energy it is found presiding over the passions, and prejudices, and affections of humanity, and pressing into its service the natural affinities and instincts of our nature, causing all to work more or less harmoniously toward the one glorious result. "Matches are made in heaven," says an old adage ; and the holy word assures us that "a prudent wife is from the Lord;" and he who opens his eye to this truth as he studies history, or observes passing life, shall have his labor amply repaid.

"There dwelt a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel ;" and those possessions consisted chiefly in flocks and herds, which his numerous servants cared for, at a distance, and exposed to danger from the hordes of predatory robbers which infested the country round Judea.

At the same time David, the son-in-law of the king and his anointed successor, was hiding himself from Saul, and with his armed men compassed and protected the shepherds and their charge, while they remained in their vicinity. It seemed but natural that it should be so. David did but follow the kindly impulse of a kind heart, or the dictate of a manly and fearless nature, and looked for no further result of the apparently accidental relation which for the time existed between him and those he protected. Yet it was not chance, but design, that threw them thus together.

The time of shearing came, and Nabal, as was customary, made a great feast. He, however, wholly neglected the injunctions which made it binding on him to remember the destitute in his hour of prosperity. David was now near by, and suffering with his army from actual want. Hearing of the festivities at Carmel, and feeling a two-fold claim on the man whom he had served, he sent messengers, begging him, in the most respectful terms, to supply their necessities. He did not know that Nabal was a churl, and was consequently not prepared for the impatient and

unkind message which was sent him in return. His anger was roused. "Gird ye on every man his sword," was his immediate and stern command to his followers. They obeyed, "and David also girded on his sword," and, with thoughts of vengeance in his heart, departed with four hundred men for the place of the sheep-shearing.

"A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." While David and his men are thus preparing to return evil for evil, the ever-watchful Providence is bringing about far other issues. Scarcely had the ill-natured Nabal uttered his bitter words before one of his young men, justly fearing the consequences, hastened to tell his mistress the exact state of affairs, and urge her, as he well knew he might, to take measures for preventing the evil which he was sure would come out of such conduct. Nabal was a man of Belial, but his wife "was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." Be not surprised at the contrast in these two, kind reader. We have said that Providence works to restore sinful man to holiness, and for this end, not for mere earthly

happiness, binds together human hearts and lives, and it often happens that the discipline which works most effectually for this result, is secured in what the world would call ill-assorted unions. We think we can perceive that Abigail's character was strengthened by the very unpleasant circumstances in which she was placed. The faults of her husband called forth her excellences, and the unhappiness which must of necessity have attended her marriage, doubtless led her to find comfort in piety. As soon as she had heard the story of the young man, with ready mind she quickly devised her plan, and as promptly prepared to put it in execution. Little dreamed David of any obstacle in the way of his evil design, much less of the fair vision which suddenly greeted his eyes, as he turned from the "covert of the hill," and met the beautiful Abigail. It is not probable that they had ever met until now, but she knew in an instant who stood before her, and "dismounting from her ass, she hastened to pay him the reverential homage due to him, alike as the anointed of the Lord and the destined king of Israel; and kneeling at

his feet, addressed him in a strain so fraught with the spirit of wisdom and piety, so truly deferential, rising, as she proceeded, almost into prophecy, that we can but wonder and admire.” “Not only does she with prudence and ready wit deprecate the anger of David by taking the trespass against him on herself, and asking his forgiveness, as if it was she who had offended; but she contrives to lessen the offence of Nabal by attributing it not to malice or determined enmity, but only to folly, which prevented his being answerable for his own actions, and therefore not worthy of David’s further regard.”

She then appeals, in the most beautiful and effective manner, to the principle of piety which she knew reigned in David’s heart, and with womanly tact evinces interest and sympathy in his hopes, and fears, and trials, while at the same time she administers a reproof so delicate, yet so just, that we have thought it may have given occasion for David’s recorded wish: “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.”

Surprised, touched, and effectually brought to his senses, David exclaims with fervor, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me : and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with my own hand. For in very deed, as the Lord God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely by the morning light there had not been one left to Nabal.”

David turned back, a wiser man, and Abigail went to her cheerless home and her brutish husband. Her trials were severe, but they were speeding to their termination. It was useless to say anything to Nabal that night, overcome as he was with feasting and drunkenness, but in the morning she told him, as she felt it her duty, all she had done. His days and his crimes were numbered. “These crimes came not indeed under the head of great delinquencies ; they were those petty sins of stingy selfishness, and an aggravating, disobliging temper, which grow upon us unconsciously, and we scarcely know their

influence till some awful stroke of judgment awakens us to what we might have been, and to what we are. His wife's narrative was this awakening stroke to Nabal." When he heard it, "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone." Ten days after, he was a dead man, and David once more exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord."

The tie which binds souls together who have aided each other in their Christian course, is one of the strongest known on earth. We never forget those who have turned our feet from the paths of sin, and David remembered with gratitude his sudden and strange interview with Abigail in the "rocky defile of Carmel." His heart turned toward her when he heard of Nabal's death, and he sent messengers to her, and she became his wife, and was the mother of his son Daniel. There was, indeed, another to share her husband's love, but doubtless she saw days of such happiness as she had never before experienced, "though in worldly state and earthly possessions David could not compare with her former husband." She became the companion of his wan-

dering and dangerous life, and was among those who were taken captive by the Amalekites, when they pillaged Ziklag in the absence of the men of war. The account is deeply affecting. Sent back by Achish, David and his men returned to the city, "and, behold, it was burned with fire ; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep." How fared it with their sorrowing wives ? How did Abigail bear up in that sad flight from her home, her husband afar, no hope of return, everything to terrify and afflict, only slavery and anguish and dishonor before her ? Was she able to put her usual confidence in Israel's God ? His providence, which had hitherto watched over her, was working still. Was it not he who caused the Philistines to distrust their Hebrew allies, and sent them in that critical moment to the rescue ? Was it not he who so ordered it that the poor Egyptian should faint and sicken, and be left by the way, that he might guide them to the camp of their foes ? " And David recovered all that the

Amalekites had carried away ; and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor anything that they had taken to them. David recovered all."

We are not told how long Abigail lived, nor can we glean anything of interest concerning her son. As she had shared David's wanderings and sorrows, she also had part in his triumph. When he took up his abode, at the command of God, in Hebron, and was anointed king, she was with him, and we cannot doubt that she was ever to him a faithful and wise counsellor, as well as a loving wife.

Her history is instructive and interesting. Her "beautiful countenance" may have won David's admiration, but her "good understanding" secured his esteem, and her piety drew on her his fervent blessing. The care of our heavenly Father for his creatures, and his hand in the smallest events, are strikingly displayed in their union, and in the circumstances which brought it to pass. Would we might learn in all things to commit our way unto him !

THE MOTHER OF REHOBOAM.

IN our brief account of Bathsheba, we mentioned that Solomon, her second son, was, by a message from God himself, to be named “Jedediah — beloved of the Lord.” Toward this child, so given, and so named, we might reasonably suppose the hearts of both David and Bathsheba would turn with peculiar interest and affection; and we are not surprised at the many proofs that this was the fact, and that his education was of the greatest importance in their eyes. “I was my father’s son,” says he, in the latter years of his life, “tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother ;” and goes on to repeat the instructions lavished upon him. We are, however, particularly interested in his testimony to his mother’s faithful counsels, recorded in the last chapter of the Proverbs, in which he gives us “the words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.” We cannot here repeat those wise instructions, but we beg our readers to open the

book and scan them closely, and see if they do not discern in them a mother's instinctive persuasion of her son's besetting weakness, even in early life betraying itself, and a mother's yearning desire to save him from a course which she feared, and justly, would ultimately prove his ruin. How earnestly, and in what glowing terms, does she descant on the excellences of a virtuous wife and the delights of true domestic bliss ! Contrast for a moment the caustic and bitter descriptions which he himself gives of those in whom he chose to place his trust, despite his mother's warnings, and whose fascinations he found "more bitter than death," with this most beautiful setting forth of true womanly attractions and worth. Alas for him ! King Solomon, with his surpassing wisdom, proved himself, in one most important particular, the fool he so often describes as despising instruction and hating reproof. He followed his own devices, and gathered about him a thousand wives, among whom, he tells us, he found not one true woman, and when he would describe such an one, unable to do it from his own experience, he is forced to recall his mother's

words, spoken to him in the days of his youth, thereby exalting one whom he always delighted to honor, though at his own expense. “Doubtless there were, among those he called by the sacred name of wife, many, who, if he had chosen one of them alone, and bound his heart to hers in true marriage, would have blessed him with woman’s devoted and faithful love. But no woman could give her whole heart for the thousandth part of a man’s. And no man who divides his affections among a thousand can know the blessedness of loving only one.”

Solomon, so far as we can learn, had only one son, and it appears to us a judgment of Heaven that it should have been so, especially as that son was such an one as to cause him to exclaim, in bitterness of spirit, as he contemplated the glory of his kingdom, and remembered who should inherit it, “I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun, because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool ? Yet he shall have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself

wise under the sun." Read faithfully the account given of the imbecile and evil-minded Rehoboam, and you will not wonder at the mournful forebodings of the father's heart. Through forty years he had counselled and instructed and warned him in vain. How earnestly he entreats him to "seek wisdom," to "cry after knowledge," to search for understanding, and how fruitless his exhortations! Well was it for him that his eyes closed to earthly scenes before the folly and crimes of this only son dismembered his fair kingdom, dispersed his people, and scattered his vast treasures to the winds.

"Why was it thus?" is often asked. "Why should so wise a father have had so foolish a son?" As well ask why example is ever a more effective teacher than precept. As well inquire why the education of our children is advancing more surely and constantly under the influences we are unconsciously exerting upon them, than under those we bring designedly to bear. How could the son of the man, who,—though he uttered three thousand proverbs, and sung songs a thousand and five; who wrote on all known species of plants, "from

the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall—of beasts, of fowls, of creeping things and of fishes ; ” whose wisdom the queen of Sheba came to hear,—was yet so weak as to have his heart turned from the living God by strange women, be otherwise than foolish ? But if this be not reason enough, we can look further. “ We hear,” it is said, “ of foolish sons having wise fathers, and of foolish fathers having wise sons, but rarely of a wise son having had a foolish mother.”

Who, then, was Rehoboam’s mother ? The simple record of Scripture is, “ Naamah, an Ammonitess.” Brief, but emphatic. Her history, as we glean by diligent searching, is this : Solomon, as early as in his eighteenth year, before the death of his father and mother (and the fact is significant, taken in connection with their counsel to him, and evident fears concerning him), married a daughter of the hated and hating Ammonites, and before he was twenty was a father — his only son called her mother. She was a descendant of those who refused needed assistance to the Israelites on their weary march from Egypt ; and

not only so, but hired Balaam, the son of Peor, to curse them as they passed, for which unkindness Jehovah commanded, “An Ammonite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord.” “Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all their days forever.” It was the Ammonites against whom Jephthah fought, and for victory over whom he sacrificed his daughter. It was the Ammonites who abused David’s messengers, whose royal city, Rabbah, Joab besieged so long, and the inhabitants of whose towns David put to torture. The malignant, and bitter, and scoffing enemies of Israel, ever on the watch to afflict and terrify the chosen people, they were found, at all times during their history, ready to mock and taunt and hinder their peace, and brought down upon themselves at last the most fearful imprecations of Jehovah. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in Rabbah of the Ammonites, and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire.” “Son of man, set thy face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them : Hear the word of the

Lord God: thus saith the Lord God; Because thou saidst, Aha, against my sanctuary when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel when it was desolate; and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity; behold, therefore, I will deliver thee to the men of the east for a possession. And I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the Ammonites a couching place for flocks; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

So abhorrent to Jehovah were the people from whom Solomon chose his wife, the mother of his son. And to that wife he gave heed more than to the law of his God. He did, indeed, build a magnificent temple to the worship of the Eternal, and offered at its dedication one of the most sublime prayers ever poured forth from mortal lips; but then, weakest, most inconsistent of men that he was, he erected on "the hill which was before Jerusalem" a high place for Moloch, the abomination of Ammon, that his idolatrous wife might offer sacrifices and burn incense to her god. Is it at all surprising that Rehoboam "prepared not his heart to seek the Lord?" that he forsook the

wise counsel of his father's friends, and adhered to that of vain, ignorant persons, like himself? Is it strange that he only served Jehovah from fear, and forsook him when he felt himself secure? Is it at all to be wondered at, that, in his days, "Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and provoked him to jealousy with their sins, and built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill and under every green tree"?

It would be interesting to inquire, had we time, what was the nature of that worship which Rehoboam's mother offered to this idol, known under three names, Moloch, Melcom, and Milcom, and there are many points which we would like to touch upon, but cannot. We once more entreat our readers not to be satisfied for a moment with these meagre sketches, but to "search the Scriptures" for themselves. They will not lose their reward.

There are lessons of deep interest to take home to our hearts from the lives of those we have been considering. The first is to "wait for the Lord." How dark, and long, and tedious, must have seemed the years of Solomon's reign to

the truly spiritual souls among the Israelites ! Notwithstanding the outward glory and magnificence, they knew that rottenness and corruption worked within. No good could come to Israel, when those who were his bitter enemies had more influence at court than any others. How strange it still appears to many that the Almighty should have borne, through forty years, the disobedience and follies and crimes of one whom he had so richly gifted, and from whom he had withheld no earthly good. He sees not as man sees. Even for this end was Solomon raised up, that he might present to all coming ages the spectacle of the most elevated, most powerful, wisest, richest of men, searching for happiness *in the things beneath the sun* ; trying, and having the ability, and the means to try, to his heart's content, every source of earthly gratification, and forced to write on all “ vanity, and vexation of spirit,” and to come humbly and penitently, through a most bitter experience, to the conviction, at last, that “ to fear God and keep his commandments ” is the only way of safety and peace to man. Ye who have sons and daughters who are not satisfied with your

assurance that you have tried the way of the world, and found it vanity, but who wish to prove it themselves ; who, in their small way, are bent on working out anew King Solomon's problem, " wait on the Lord and be of good courage." The end is not yet. " Great and singular is the honor which God has set upon patient waiting for him. Man, seeing not as God sees, sets higher value upon his fellows' active works — the bright deeds of days and hours. God values these also ; but he does not assign them the same preëminence as man does ; he does not allow them any preëminence over that constant and long-enduring struggle with the risings of the natural mind, which is evinced in long and steady waiting, under all discouragements, for him, in the assured conviction that he will come at last for deliverance and protection, although his chariot wheels tarry long." His plans are far-reaching ; and although you long for the immediate conversion and present usefulness of your children, he may see that, as in Solomon's case, the long, and tardy, and difficult process, and the final reluctant confession and return, shall

work in more and better ways for the good of his kingdom. Therefore learn "to labor and to wait."

But there is yet another lesson to the young, who are starting forth upon the paths of life, and are unwilling to profit by the experience, or accept the counsels, of their parents and friends. Although you may have the satisfaction of following your own chosen way through many years, and by the grace of God at last be saved, so as by fire, you cannot repair the wrong which such a course will do to those dependent on you. Solomon might have learned the lesson of fearing God from his father, and might have been persuaded by his mother's affectionate entreaties to choose a virtuous wife. Then, instead of the disappointment and anguish he suffered from seeing his son foolish and impious, and having the judgments of God denounced upon him; dying in disgrace, and dishonor, and disappointment; he might have been blessed with woman's true love, obedient children, and a long-continued posterity upon the throne of his father. No late repentance

could possibly accomplish for others what an upright and consistent life would have done. Therefore the wicked Rehoboam lived and died the monument of his father's sin, and of his mother's hatred to the God of the Israelites.

THE MOTHER OF ABIJAH.

THE following beautiful account is from Dr. Kitto's Daily Bible Illustrations, which we copy as being far before anything we could say, and which covers all the ground. And we take occasion here to urge our readers to make themselves familiar with the writings of this noble scholar, and benefactor of all Bible students.

" This quiet place apart, among the enclosing hills, is Shiloh. It was once the seat of the Lord's tabernacle, his altar, and his ark, and was then replete with holy activities and solemn sounds. But, since these departed, it has been well-nigh forsaken, and has relapsed into a silent village, or small rural town. Yet still holy things are here—holy men, who have found here a sort of refuge from the wickedness of the time — a quiet retreat, favorable to sacred memories, and to the nourishment of holy thoughts. Among them is Abijah, that old prophet who rent the

new cloak of Jeroboam, and promised him the largest share of the divided kingdom. He is now blind. Upon the outer world, made foul by man's abominations, he has closed his eyes, and sees and lives by the light that shines within.

"Now observe that woman stealing down the street, and seeking the old prophet's house. By her guise she is of the peasantry, and she bears a basket. Yet her gait scarcely befits her garb ; and the quick, furtive glance she casts around her, her coarse hood-veil, betray some conscious concealment, some fear of recognition, some purpose she would not wish to have known.

"This woman, mean as she seems, is the lady of the land ; and, although her basket contains but a few cakes and biscuit, and a little honey, she might, if she pleased, have filled it with precious and costly things. She is the wife of Jeroboam — as far as we know, his only wife — the mother of his heir ; and, therefore, if he had a score of wives, the chief of them all. That heir, by name Abijah, is alarmingly ill ; and, at the instance of Jeroboam, and impelled by motherly love, that royal lady has come all the way

from Tirzah, in this disguise, that she may learn from the prophet what is to become of her son ; and the things in her basket are gifts for the man of God, suited to the condition she had assumed. The disguise was thought necessary to conceal this visit from the people, and partly in the idle hope of obtaining, in the semblance of another, the desired answer, unmixed with the reproof and denunciation which Jeroboam knew that his conduct had been calculated to draw down from the prophet who had foretold his exaltation. He thus foolishly thought to coerce the Lord, through his prophet, out of an answer of peace, and slyly to evade the judgment he feared might be connected with it ; and he idly calculated that the prophet, whose view could extend into the future, hid in the counsels of God, could not see through a present matter wrapped up only in the thin cover of a woman's hood.

" All this fine contrivance was blown to pieces the moment the wife of Jeroboam crossed Abijah's threshold ; for then she heard the voice of the blind prophet—‘ Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam ; why feignest thou thyself to be an-

other ? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings.' He then broke forth in a strong tide of denunciation against Jeroboam, because he had sinned, and made Israel to sin ; and the voice which had proclaimed his rise from a low estate to royal power, now, with still stronger tone, proclaimed the downfall and ruin of his house — quenched in blood — its members to find tombs only in the bowels of beasts and birds. There was one exception — only one. The youth of whom she came to inquire, he only should come to his grave in peace, by dying of his present disease, because in him only was 'found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.'

" Woful tidings these for a mother's heart ; and scarcely, perhaps, intelligible to her stunned intellect. Here was a beginning of judgment upon Jeroboam, and upon her, because she was his. Judgment in taking away the only well-conditioned and worthy son ; and judgment stored up in and for the ill-conditioned ones who were suffered to remain. God, when it suits the purpose of his wisdom and his justice, can afflict no less by what he spares than by what he takes.

" Yet there was mercy in his judgment ; mercy, strange as it seems to say, to him on whom the sentence of death was passed. It is so stated ; and it is more intelligible than it seems. It was because there *was* some good thing found in him that he should die. Death was to be for him a reward, a blessing, a deliverance. He should die peaceably upon his bed ; for him all Israel should mourn ; for him many tears be shed, and he should be brought with honor to his tomb. More than all, he would be taken from his part in the evil that hung over his house, and the Lord's vindictory justice would thus be spared the seeming harshness of bringing ruin upon a righteous king for his father's crimes. Alas ! how little do we know the real objects of the various incidents of life and death — of mercy, of punishment, and of trial ! In this case the motives are disclosed ; and we are suffered to glance upon some of the great secrets of death, which form the trying mysteries of life. Having the instance, we can find the parallels of lives, full of hope and promise, prematurely taken, and that in mercy, we

can judge, to those who depart. The heavenly Husbandman often gathers for his garner the fruit that early ripens, without suffering it to hang needlessly long, beaten by storms, upon the tree. O, how often, as many a grieved heart can tell, do the Lord's best beloved die betimes, taken from the evil to come, while the unripe, the evil, the injurious, live long for mischief to themselves and others! Roses and lilies wither far sooner than thorns and thistles.

“Doleful were the tidings which the disguised princess had to bear back to the beautiful town of Tirzah. All remoter griefs were, probably, to her swallowed up in this, which rung continually in her ears in all her homeward way: ‘When thy feet enter into the city the child shall die.’ It is heavy tidings to a mother that she must lose her well-beloved son; but it is a grievous aggravation of her trouble that she might not see him before he died. They who were about him knew not that he was to die to-day, and, therefore, could not estimate the preciousness of his last hours, and the privilege of being there near him, and of receiving his

embrace. She knew ; and she might not be near, nor pour out upon her dying son the fulness of a mother's heart. Knowing that her son lay on his death-bed, her first impulse must have been to fly home to receive his dying kiss, but her second, to linger by the way, as if to protract that dear life which must close the moment she entered the city. Never, surely, before or since, was a distressed mother so wofully torn between the contrary impulses of her affection !

"At last her weary steps reached the city, and as she entered its gates her son died, and she was only just in time to press to her arms the heart still warm, although it had ceased to beat."

JEZEBEL.

ALAS, that a name which has descended to us so covered with reproach, which has become a proverb, an epithet most odious, must be numbered and enrolled in our list of mothers ! Alas, that to one so evil should have been permitted sacred maternal ties ! Alas, that sweet, ductile infancy and childhood should ever have been intrusted to hands so profane !

We shrink from the task imposed upon us, of portraying a character which becomes more revolting the deeper we study into it, which amazes us by its utter deformity, and seems to have no redeeming traits.

It has been said that Jezebel sat for the picture which Shakspeare has drawn of Lady Macbeth ; but, if it be so, Nature's unrivalled portrait-painter, for once, fell far short of his original. He does, indeed, make his heroine, "burning with unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen," cherish horrible imaginings un-

til she fancies she can dare and do. But Jezebel's cold, cruel nature needs no such working up. The daughter and wife of a king, and mother of kings and queens, no such bauble as a crown attracts her ; but, if it did, she would find a way to gain it, nor scruple at the means. The lady of the drama invokes with brave words, —

“ Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from crown to the toe, top full
Of direst cruelty ” —

yet shrinks appalled from the resemblance to her father in the sleeping Duncan, and faints when she finds her husband has added the murder of the chamberlains to that of the king. In Jezebel we vainly look for one womanly relenting, one gentle weakness to soften the hard lines of more than masculine firmness. To accomplish her fell purposes she can deliberately attempt the extirpation from Israel of every prophet of Jehovah, nor shrink one moment from its execution. She can look calmly on while famine stalks gaunt and fearful through her husband's fair kingdom, destroying every green thing, and turning to a

barren waste the rich and fertile fields, and bringing unutterable distress on all his subjects. One word of sincere repentance from her might stay the desolation ; but in her judgment it would be better that the whole nation perish with hunger and drought than that her designs should be frustrated. She can coolly summon the innocent to a mockery of judgment, and as coolly exult that he is not alive, but stoned and dead. She can threaten the Lord's messenger with an oath more becoming a pirate's than a woman's mouth ; and who for one moment doubts that she will fulfil the horrible intent, if she has opportunity, or supposes that any feminine delicacy, any "milk of human kindness," will prevent her "playing false," or "catching the nearest way" to her expected end ?

The wife of the thane of Glamis urges her husband on to his deed, and reproaches him with his timidity.

" From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeared
To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,

And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting ‘I dare not’ wait upon ‘I would’? ”

Forcible words, but yet a woman’s argument. Hear with what a concentration of contempt and self-sufficiency, which scorns all sense of need, much more, dependence on another’s act, the haughty queen of Israel addresses her baby husband, whining for his neighbor’s land :

“ Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel ? Arise and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry ; I will give thee the field of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

When the guilty deed is done to which Macbeth and his wife have wrought themselves, and conscience fills him with terrors, and he complains pitifully of the two men who spoke to his affrighted ear, in their sleep,

“ One cried, ‘ God bless us,’ and ‘ Amen ’ the other,
As they had seen these hangman’s hands.
Listening their fear, I could not say amen,
When they did say, ‘ God bless us.’

Wherefore could I not pronounce amen ?
I had most need of blessing, and amen
Stuck in my throat.”

She strives to answer with quiet unconcern and indifference, but betrays her own inward trembling :

“ Consider it not so deeply,
These deeds must not be thought
After these ways ; so it will make us mad.”

And working “deeply,” the thought did make her mad, and rendered her nights restless, and her days wretched, and finally raised her stained “little hand” to the last act of self-destruction.

Would we could find one trace of conscience or of introspection in the subject of our study. But no such signs of better nature appear. Unawed, unmoved, she passes on alike through miracles of judgment and of mercy. “Ahab cannot entirely divest himself of every national characteristic, or the remembrances and associations of his faith and his people. There still cling to him some remains of the fear of the ‘Lord God of his fathers,’ some feelings of reverence and awe for the name and worship of Jehovah. No such compunctions trouble Jezebel. When Elijah visits Ahab, the impious mon-

arch quails before him, and trembles at the denunciations of divine wrath. Jezebel answers his reproof by scorn and threats, and her menaces drive the prophet from the altar where he has triumphed.” Famine,— blood,— the fire from heaven which attests Jehovah’s Godhead, and puts to confusion her idolatrous priests,— prophetic warnings,— the fearful death of her husband and sons,— the certainty and awfulness of her own doom,— the remembrance of direful crimes; nothing,— nothing has power for one moment to awe her spirit or subdue her indomitable will. She is Jezebel to the last moment, when, with painted face and tired head, and scornful, taunting words, she mocks the conqueror, under whose chariot wheels she is the next instant crushed.

If Shakspeare attempted to delineate such a character, who can blame him that he came not up to that which no mortal might dare, and hope to retain the reputation of being true to nature? None but he who sees not as man sees— who looks upon the heart, might expect to be believed when testifying of one so “desperately wicked.”

Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon. The natural pride of her heart was nursed from youth in that queenly city, "which sat enthroned on ivory, covered with blue and purple;" the merchant city, whose merchants were princes, whose traffickers were the honorable of the earth, — whose wares, emeralds, purple and broidered work, and fine linen, and coral and agate, were the desire of all nations, — whose king had supplied Solomon with men and materials for the temple at Jerusalem. A rival temple rose under Jezebel's influence at Samaria, dedicated to Baal, whose worship she determined should be extended throughout her husband's kingdom, whatever the means which must be used to accomplish it. Too well did she succeed. Ahab sold himself, under her arts, to work such wickedness as was never before known in Israel, and the number of those who bowed not the knee to Baal was reduced, by her indefatigable efforts, to seven thousand, among the millions of Israel, and these so scattered and fearful, that Elijah knew not of their existence.

As a mother, we shall have occasion to speak of Jezebel hereafter. We beg our readers to acquaint themselves thoroughly with this most interesting period of Hebrew history, and especially to search out the remarkable prophecies fulminated against Tyre, while then in the very summit of her glory, and their more remarkable fulfilment. To stimulate their curiosity, we will speak of one instance. “ Ships from Tyre, out on a three years’ voyage, returned to find the city razed to the ground, which they had left, and looked to find once more in the perfection of beauty, giving a significance to the prophecy of Isaiah not at first obvious, — “ Howl, ye ships of Tarshish ; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish ; for your strength is laid waste.”

O, that we could persuade the young to study the Bible with diligence and interest ! They would soon find that it surpasses all other books, and say with another, while contemplating the loftiest flights of human genius,

“ Great God ! when once compared with thine,
How mean their writings look ! ”

ATHALIAH.

IT is a time of almost universal rejoicing in Samaria. One theme burdens every tongue, and absorbs all thoughts. In the palace, sounds of revelry and mirth are heard, and gorgeous sights are seen. The magnificent apartments are rivalled only by Tyrian splendor—the ends of the earth have contributed to the sumptuous entertainments—nor wealth nor labor have been spared to make the wedding feast of the royal daughter of Israel and the royal son of Judah eclipse all similar feasts and scenes.

There is rejoicing in the palace. Ahab, roused from his indolence and easy indifference, feels unwonted satisfaction as he bestows his child on the heir of Judah's crown, and hopes the union will give him useful allies in the place of dreaded foes, and perhaps bring the hitherto contending tribes again under one dominion. Jezebel rejoices. Athaliah is her only daughter, but she is a child after her mother's own heart.

With far-seeing eye, and deep knowledge of human nature, she looks into the future, and her heart shrinks not from its own prophesyings. She fears not, though her child is to be removed from her influence and surrounded with the worshippers of Jehovah. She has sown her seed faithfully ; she has watched and watered the springing shoots ; by example and precept she has trained this object of her care, and she has no doubts of the harvest. Her gratification is without alloy as she sees her wedded to Jehoram, and hails her, in anticipation, queen of Judah.

There is rejoicing in the city. Long and dreary has been the separation between those who were once brethren. But though bitter thoughts and feelings have often been cherished, the old love was not extinct, and now it is ready to revive and flourish, and its fruit is joy. Now all are full of hope. No more envying and strife ; no more shedding of kindred blood ; union and peace shall again prevail. Some, whose hearts have not wholly gone after idols, are glad in the hope of visiting once more the holy city, and the temple of their God, and dream of returning

days of gladness, such as were in the olden time, and ere they are aware, find themselves singing the sweet songs of Zion, and feel an exhilaration of spirit to which they have long been strangers. It is not so, indeed, with all. A few there are whose hearts are not so sanguine—who wonder if direction has been asked of the Lord in this matter—who wonder where Elijah is, and what he says—who have great confidence in Jehoram's father, but yet dread the mingling of the two courts, and the influence of Athaliah over the young prince. They are few, however; the majority are filled with the most delightful hopes.

There is rejoicing in the groves, and high places, and in the temples of Baal and Ashtaroth; wild, fearful rejoicing, and the bridal is there celebrated with rites so profane, and orgies so impious, that we attempt not their description. The priests which sit at Jezebel's table enter into the anticipations of their mistress. They, too, are glad in the hope of a union between Israel and Judah, but it is a union not for good, but for evil, which they desire. They look to see Baal yet enshrined in Jerusalem. They are glad in ex-

pectation of the overthrow of that mighty power which so confounded them at Carmel. They hope yet to triumph over the mocking prophet who derided them in the day of their confusion. They shout with new exultation as they predict that the priests of Jehovah will soon share the fate of their friends who perished so ingloriously at Kishon.

Jehoram takes his bride to her new home. Her youth, and already queenly beauty and dignity, become her station well. She is welcomed and prospered, and all things smile on the noble pair. It is meet there should be rejoicing and gladness.

* * * * *

It is a time of woe in Jerusalem ! Mourners go about the streets, and sadness sits on all countenances. The good Jehoshaphat is gathered to his fathers. Twenty-five years he has reigned, "doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord," and receiving on himself and his kingdom the blessing of those who serve him. He is gone, and who will now stand in his place ? Many times has he travelled through the land, from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, to

strengthen his people in the faith, and to bring back many to Jehovah, the God of their fathers. Who will again prove so good a shepherd to this wandering flock ? Who, in the hour of peril, will offer sublime and effectual prayer ? Who will manifest animating and encouraging faith in Jehovah, as he did, even appointing singers to go before his army to keep their hearts from faintness by praising the enduring mercy of their God ? Who will now see that justice is done in every fenced city and every hamlet, and enforce the law of the Lord ?

Jehoshaphat is dead. Reason enough for sorrow ; but this is not the sole cause of the gloom which pervades the land of Judah. In untimely graves, slain by a brother's hand, lie his six noble sons, with many of their companions, "the princes of Israel ;" and many homes are desolate, many hearts suddenly widowed, many children are fatherless, and fear falls on all. Why was this deed done ? These were inoffensive men, enjoying quietly and contentedly the privileges granted them by their father. Jehoram has the throne. Can he not sit securely there except

these are put out of life ? Who instigated this needless cruelty ? Alas ! Jehoram has the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel for his wife, and the same evil policy which has so long governed in Israel now bears sway in Judah. Darkness begins to gather even over the holy city and the temple of Jehovah.

Years bring no changes for the better. Ambition and selfishness are the ruling principles of the court. The pure worship of the living God is fast being superseded by the idolatrous services to Baal. Groves and high places are frequented, and there is none to recall with gentle voice, and kindly admonition, these straying sheep. The king is their adviser to evil, and even obliges them to do honor to idols. The children follow the steps of their parent. “The sons of Athaliah, *that wicked woman,*” says the sacred record, “broke up the house of God, and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim.” Retribution at length begins. Tributary nations revolt ; but as God is not sought unto against them, no divine blessing, as of old, accompanies the armies, and the king

fails to subdue them. Philistines, Arabians, Ethiopians, combine and ravish the country, and carry away even the treasures of Jehoram's house and drag his children to captivity and death. The hand of the Lord, whom he has forsaken, is in all these calamities, and is at length laid heavily on his own person. A loathsome and incurable disease brings him to the grave, and he departs from life regretted by none, not even by the wife of his youth, to whose favor and influence he has sacrificed his own welfare and that of his kingdom ; who has been to him in the place of his father's God, and whose selfish, cruel nature has overborne every kindly impulse, every generous and good principle, which might have governed him in his younger days, when his father chose to leave him successor to his throne.

Athaliah, unhumbled by the afflictions which have befallen her, unsoftened by the sufferings of her husband and children, having acted the part of an evil wife, now assumes one still more revolting. Her only remaining son ascends the throne of his father. He is not a boy. Forty-two years have afforded him much experience and

instruction. The greater part of his life has been spent under the benign and gracious influences of his grandfather's reign, and he has seen in his father's course the bitter consequences of departing from the Lord. Perhaps he may choose the better path. Perchance, trembling at the awful denunciations of divine wrath, he may be induced to walk cautiously, and save himself and his people. There is hope yet for Judah. Vain expectation ! “ Ahaziah walked in the ways of the house of Ahab : *for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.*”

How great the change which has passed over the chosen people since the day of that joyous bridal, which was to so many the harbinger of all good things ! Jehovah is forsaken. Baal is for the time triumphant. In place of Zion's songs are the profane shouts of idolaters, or the secret groans and tears of those who mourn over the desolations of the sanctuary as for the loss of a first-born ! How great the change from the youthful bride, to Athaliah, the wife and mother, whose very name is an execration !

It is a time of unmitigated horror in the land of Judea. Words fail to describe it. Imagination shrinks, appalled, on the threshold of the scene. A most bitter cup is wrung out for hundreds of agonized hearts. In days long gone, in the field of the murdered Naboth, the stern prophet of the Lord had foretold to Ahab an awful scene of destruction which should come upon his family for his sins, and that himself should be the first victim of divine vengeance. Ahab died as was predicted ; but years have rolled since then, and no sign of any further fulfilment of those prophetic words has yet appeared, and those most concerned pursue their evil way, wholly regardless of them, and apparently without fear. Elijah has left the earth, and can harm them no more,—at least, so they thought,—until, mysteriously, six years after his ascension, there came from his hand the fearful “writing” to Jehoram, which warned him of the trouble that awaited him, and which was so exactly accomplished. Perhaps they sometimes tremble lest they should again see his hated form, or hear his terrible words. Perhaps they now and then remember Elijah’s

God, and for a moment quail. But if such thoughts do visit them, they have no restraining or beneficial effect. Jezebel still rules over her son and his people in Israel, and Athaliah follows her footsteps in Jerusalem, little dreaming of the storm so soon to burst upon them.

The time has now come ! Blood flows in the streets of Jezreel, and blood flows in Samaria ! — at the shearing-house in the way ; in the house of Baal ; in Jerusalem ! Human life has no value. Human affections are a thing of naught. Nobles and princes fall by a bloody executioner, and not a hand is lifted in their defence. She who was yesterday the reigning queen of Israel — the haughty daughter of Tyre, at whose word men trembled — to-day, nothing can be found of her but the palms of her hands and the soles of her feet !

But of all the horrors of this awful time, those enacted in Jerusalem exceed the rest. A woman's hand will outdo even the blood-thirsty, cold-hearted Jehu. The sudden appearance of men bearing the body of her just murdered son — the destruction of all her kindred — the dread-

ful death of her mother — nothing can for a moment turn Athaliah from her thoughts of self-aggrandizement, from accomplishing her own ambitious designs. She will imbrue her hands in blood. She will not take the life of men, but of children — infants — the offspring of her only son — those whose first lispings called her grandmother !

We can follow her no further. We sicken at the sight of such a monster sitting on the throne of David. We said there appeared no redeeming traits in Jezebel's character ; but, when compared with her daughter, she is to be praised. " Some of the feelings of the woman, the tenderness of the wife, the fondness of the mother, still seem to have lingered in her proud heart. Unprincipled as she was, she did not abandon herself to utter selfishness. In her most atrocious acts she seems to have had some regard to the aggrandizement of her family, and to the gratification of her husband. Athaliah is utterly selfish, devoid even of the instinct of natural affection. Although the depravity of Jezebel led her to adopt a corrupt religion, to reject a pure and

holy worship, and cling to the dark and cruel rites of heathenism, the voice of conscience was not silenced, the light of the soul was not entirely extinguished. She felt the need of some faith: she clung to the altars of her gods. But Athaliah seems to have sunk into the brutishness of those who own ‘no God.’ She seems to have trampled on all faith, as she violated all obligation. She had high mental endowments; she had a powerful will and strong passions, but she had no affections. There have been many Jezebels, but few Athaliahs.”

The children of both these mothers were such as we should expect, save only one, Jehosheba, the daughter of Athaliah, and wife of Jehoidah the high priest. She, in the day of her mother’s insane cruelty, saved alive her brother’s infant son, and in the sacred recesses of the temple acted toward him a mother’s part, and, with her excellent husband, trained him up in the fear of the Lord. It is refreshing to turn the thoughts to her and her charge during these gloomy years. Her trials must have been severe. Her pure spirit must have been sorely afflicted, and we

think she must have been relieved when the gloomy tragedy ended in the death of her mother, violent though it was, as she knew it must be. Of the days in which Jezebel and Athaliah lived we have yet more to say.

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.

BAAL has almost triumphed in Israel. Ahab is yet alive and unreformed ; Jezebel, his impious consort, is still mad upon her idols ; the prophets are prophesying lies ; the priests are bearing rule by their means, and the people love to have it so. Desolating drouth and famine from Jehovah afflict the tribes who have wandered so grievously, and extend into all the surrounding country. Distress and death are in many households, and even ignorant idolaters begin to tremble at the displeasure of the Hebrew God, though neither they nor Israel are prepared to propitiate him by repentance and obedience.

* * * * *

Twilight is beginning to gather over the inhabitants of a small town in the borders of Sidon, and with the twilight a deeper gloom than any night could bring. Gaunt figures move languidly about ; despairing tones fall sadly on the ear ;

animation, vigor, joy, seem to have fled from every countenance ; even childhood has lost its “ birthright of gladness,” and moans take the place of songs. Nature around sympathizes with this universal dreariness. Not a green thing is to be seen. The parched, baked earth gives a sound under every footstep ; the rain of the land is powder and dust. No placid lake, no sparkling rill, refreshes the eye ; no murmur of flowing waters is heard. Men have ceased to look upward with hopeful glances, and the question has not been put for a long time, “Are there any signs of rain ?” Every morning the sun lifts his undimmed eye as if to gaze in mocking joy upon the scene, and sends his scorching rays pitilessly down through the long hours, not once halting in his course, nor seeking for a moment his pavilion of clouds ; and his parting look, as he sinks to his rest at night, red with his fiery march, but promises another morrow like this day, only more terrible. From the hill-sides is heard the sound of lowing herds and bleating sheep, and groups of men come slowly and sadly from a vain search for greener pastures and water

wherewith to stay the thirst of their suffering cattle. Lord God Almighty, who can stand before thy judgments !

As the twilight deepens, a female form is seen, with wan countenance and languid steps, emerging from a small cottage. She wanders slowly on, gathering dried sticks in her hand, when she is suddenly accosted by a stranger with the earnest request, " Bring me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." The tone is one of distress, and she looks up to see from whom it comes. A man of dark, stern aspect, clothed in skins, with a staff in his hand, stands before her, evidently worn and weary with long travel, and suffering from want. A glance is sufficient to inform her whence he comes, though she has never before seen him. None in all that region can be ignorant of the minutest particulars of the appearance of Elijah, the terrible prophet of Jehovah, for whom Ahab has searched every kingdom and country, that he might destroy him. Why is he here, so far from his friends, and in the land of his deadliest foes ? Comes he peaceably, or with further denunciations of vengeance

against the followers of Baal ? She knows not — asks not. Moved by his need and by an unseen influence, she returns at his request to bring him a portion of the precious beverage which still remains to her. As she is about to enter the house, he again addresses her. “ Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.” This is beyond her power. She now speaks, and the whole story of her own woes finds utterance in few but expressive words. “ As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse ; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.” Despair is in her tones and her countenance. She seems to expect no deliverance ; but Elijah has now for her words of cheer. “ Fear not : go and do as thou hast said ; but make me a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shalt not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.”

The drouth still continues, and men's hearts fail them, and human beings and beasts perish ; but, in the dwelling of the widow, comfort from this time reigns. Morning, noon, and night, she finds the *handful* of meal in the barrel and the *little oil* in the cruse. It does not increase. No quantity at any time assures her of a supply for days to come, or raises her above the need of faith. Neither does it waste, nor fail. She takes what she needs, and there is always a little still remaining.

"So, perhaps, thou, Christian, wilt not receive any superabundance of believing joyfulness, so as to be enabled to shout for joy in the furnace of affliction ; but rest assured of the faithfulness of thy God, that he will uphold thy faith. This thy compassionate High Priest has implored for thee, as well as for his apostle Peter ; and he will daily supply thee with so much patience, by daily renewing it, that although thou mayest occasionally doubt and droop, thou shalt never despair or perish."

Two years pass, and Elijah resides with the widow of Zarephath in peaceful seclusion. She

attends to his temporal wants, and he instructs her in the word of the Lord. For the first time she now learns the truth that there is one only living and true God, and understands how just is his displeasure towards those who worship images their own hands have made, or the sun and the moon, which are his creatures. Conscience is awakened in her breast. She is taught his claims upon herself; and her own individual responsibility, as one whom he has created and sustains, is brought to bear upon her. She is enlightened day by day; and when, at last, her only son sickens and dies, the work of conviction is complete. She draws immediately her own conclusions, and bitter indeed to her soul they are. Israel departs from the Lord, and dreadful famine is sent in punishment. She, on whom he has bestowed all the blessings of life, has never known or worshipped him; and, though instructed by his prophet, she has been slow to believe, and now *her* punishment has come. She has seen her child, her only and most precious one, die before her eyes. She is alone in the world, and to her own ingratitude and sinfulness

she must lay her sorrow. Her whole life rises up before her, and seems to her still ignorant mind to have been just recalled to the mind of Jehovah. She trembles. She wishes Elijah had never come under her roof. She might then have lived on unremembered. By a most common development of human nature, her goaded feelings find expression in reproaches against another, though the turmoil is within herself.

Elijah pities from his inmost heart this friend who has shown so much kindness to him in his need, and, taking her dead child from her, goes to his chamber; and there transpires the scene which is familiar to all Bible readers, and is most sublime, even incomprehensible to our weak faith, the result of which restored to the afflicted widow her child and sealed her an heir of the Covenant, and so accomplished one end which was intended in his sojourn in the land of idolaters.

The widow of Zarephath is one of six or more mothers mentioned in the Bible, in whose behalf miracles were performed, and, in every instance, to save the life of their children. How much more will our heavenly Father be willing to give

us the eternal salvation of the dear ones for whom we pray !

There are volumes of instruction in this short narrative. The situation of Israel during those years — the trial of Elijah's faith — the career of Ahab and his family — the results of God's dealings with this humble woman, — all draw forth our meditations, and are deeply interesting. We advise our readers to study Dr. Krummacher's "Elijah the Tishbite," and promise them, in so doing, as refreshing a draught as was the cup of cold water the prophet received at the widow's hand when he stopped at her door after his long walk from Cherith.

THE SHUNAMITE.

JEHORAM, the son of Ahab, reigns in Israel. Elijah has gone from his earthly trials, and entered on the heavenly rest—not dying alone under the juniper tree, as he once begged he might, but borne triumphantly upward—his equipage a royal one—his convoy, angelic bands. His mantle has fallen on Elisha, who now goes up and down, strengthening weak hands, comforting sad hearts, instructing the ignorant, warning the perverse, and prophesying, in the name of the Lord, of the things which are to come. Like one who, in the days of his flesh, “went about doing good,” “hiding his power,” Elisha’s mission was one of mercy. He dealt more in loving-kindness than in rebukes, and, unlike his stern predecessor, was more loved than feared. In his journeyings to and from the various schools of the prophets, he passes often through the town of Shunem, and forms there a pleasant and refreshing acquaint-

ance with one of the few families who still worship and reverence the God of their fathers, and have not bowed the knee to Baal. The mistress of the family first invites him to make her house his resting-place, and at last, with the consent of her husband, has a separate apartment built for his use alone, and thus provides him a home under her roof, and secures his frequent presence, and therewith the blessing of Jehovah. What can I do for her ? is Elisha's first thought, as he takes possession of the comfortable "chamber," and sees its appliances, and appreciates the considerate kindness which prompted to this good deed. He sends his servant to call her, and asks her if he shall speak for her to the king. He has an interest at court. But a short time since he saved the lives of three kings, under God ; and if she has any request to make, his name will secure its fulfilment. But she is a contented woman. She desires nothing that royalty can bestow, so she retires, leaving Elisha still in her debt. He appeals to his servant. What, then, is to be done for her, Gehazi ? Gehazi has not failed to notice a great lack in the otherwise de-

lightful home of this good woman. She has a husband on whom she leans — friends in whom she trusts — an abundance of this world's goods ; but she is, nevertheless, a lone woman ; she has no child. No smiling babe has ever lain in her bosom ; no tiny hand has ever been placed confidingly in hers ; no tottering footsteps follow her as she pursues her household avocations ; no sweet, lisping voice calls her mother ; no bird-like notes make perpetual music by her hearth-stone. There is a want in her house and in her heart.

“A babe in a house is a well-spring of pleasure,—a messenger of peace and love ;

A resting-place for innocence on earth ; a link between angels and men.”

And how sad a house is that where no such well-spring sends forth its sweet waters, purifying from selfish loves, and pouring out its tide of generous and holy joys ! How lonely the home to which the Creator sends no such messenger to whisper from himself a loving rebuke to hardened hearts, and to call forth all gentle, peace-breath-

ing thoughts and aspirations ! How weary the home which has no such resting-place ; where dwell only those who have been long conversant with sins and follies, and have forgotten their guileless days ! How far from heaven, alas ! is that home which has no sweet link between men and angels — where no cradled cherub communes in its smiling sleep with sister spirits, and lifts the heart of fond parental love involuntarily to the pure and blessed abode of those who day and night sing praises to their eternal King !

O, sordid, selfish, earthly heart, which shrinkest from the care, and toil, and self-sacrifice, that infancy and childhood impose, and would fain go on thy way without such cumbrance ! how foolish and ignorant thou provest thyself ! how miserably dost thou mistake in the matter of thy happiness ! Thou wast not made to dwell at ease, nor canst thou. Some care and labor God will surely lay on thee. How much better than all other, that which will reward thee sevenfold — which will elevate and refine, and emancipate thy grovelling soul ! Thou wast not made to live alone, and if thou wilt not have the com-

panionship which God made thy nature to crave, thou shalt pine in discontent and weariness. Life shall often seem to thee a wilderness, though thou art surrounded with a thousand blessings and have scores of friends. Deep in thy secret heart ennui and distaste of all pleasures shall be a frequent guest; thou shalt be in want, and know not what thou desirest. The blessing of God in its fulness shall not rest on thee, because thou art not willing to do his work and fulfil his commands.

Thou sad heart, which art by Providence denied the boon for which, like Hannah, thou hast often prayed, yield meekly to his decrees, who has assured thee that *all things* shall work for thy good. He hath some richer gift for thee. If thou walk the path of privation humbly, he will give thee “a name better than of sons and daughters.” Himself hath spoken it.

“What shall we do for this Shunamite?” says Elisha. “Verily she hath no child,” answers Gehazi, “and her husband is old.” “Call her,” says Elisha; and she stands in the door. “A few months hence thou shalt embrace a son,” is

the astounding intelligence to which she listens, and for which she has no credence. "O, man of God, do not lie unto me! Too many years have I longed in vain for such a blessing, and now it cannot be. I hope no more. Do not wake again fond dreams in my foolish heart. Leave me to the forced content which has so long been my portion, and to the employments which are the solace of my lonely life."

* * . * *

It was no lie which the man of God uttered. Years have passed since he said to his kind hostess, "Thou shalt embrace a son;" and now see wherever about the house, or in the court, her labors require her, a little boy, with busy feet and prattling tongue, follows on, and none but a mother's heart can guess what showers of unuttered blessings attend his every step. She stops to caress him, she arrays him in fitting garments, ties his hat under his dimpled chin, kisses him again and again, and bids a servant take him to his father in the field. With animated step and happy looks she pursues her work, preparing the

meal which the laborers in that weary field, under the burning sun, will soon need.

Suddenly she is summoned. The little boy is ill, and one has brought him back to her. She takes him on her lap, wipes his face where the moisture stands, folds him tenderly in her arms, and looks anxiously upon him. He utters no cry, but moans, “My head! my head!” She bathes his fair brow, and soothes him with a cradle-song; but he grows no better. He suffers, and anguish rends her heart. He gasps and shudders, and his little arms relax their hold of her neck. Can it be? His life has fled! Once more “she has no child.” She gazes for a moment vacantly upon the lifeless form, and then, roused by a sudden impulse, rises and bears him to that consecrated chamber where she first received the promise of his life. Cannot the power which gave him to her recall him now? She lays him on the prophet’s bed, and with one longing, lingering look, she calmly closes the door, and leaves him there. As calmly she calls to her husband, and begs him to send her a servant and an ass, saying she wishes to go to

Elisha, and will soon return ; and when he questions of the reason for this sudden determination, she simply answers, "It shall be well." He has forgotten that his boy was ill, so slight seemed his trouble, and she does not tell him that he is childless. No faltering of voice, no tears, appeal to him for sympathy. A faith stronger than death has taken possession of her soul, and she will try its efficacy before she so grievously afflicts the father's heart.

She comes to Mount Carmel, and, as she draws near, Gehazi meets her, and asks, by Elisha's direction, if all is well with her and her family. "It is well," she answers. She has no errand to Gehazi — no words to waste.

She presses on, and, hastily descending from the ass, throws herself upon the ground, and clasps Elisha's feet, but speaks not. The man of God is perplexed. The friend who has been ever considerate and kind to him, in such trouble, and the cause hidden from him ! At last her overcharged heart utters forth its bitterness. "Did I desire a son of my lord ? Did I not say, Do not deceive me ?" He understands it

now. “Gird up thy loins, Gehazi,” he says quickly, “and take my staff in thy hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child.” Does Elisha think the mother will be satisfied? No; her faith does not follow Gehazi. She still clings to him whose words first awakened in her heart a mother’s hopes. He must himself go with her. And he will. Silently they pursue their way, till Gehazi meets them with the words, “The child is not awaked.” They come to the house and enter. Death has hushed all that was joyous there. Elisha goes to his own room — the mother we know not whither. And while that sublime scene is transpiring, in which the human soul, already passed within the veil, is recalled to its earthly tabernacle, by the power of a mortal’s prayer, how is she employed? We are not told, but something whispers in our hearts that perchance the mother’s faith and mother’s supplications took hold on the everlasting and Almighty arm, as truly as did those of the prophet.

We cannot fathom the counsels of the Almighty, nor give a reason why this mother, after enduring the pangs of separation from her child, should have been permitted the joy of embracing him again, and seeing him live on to manhood. “He doeth all things well,” *as well* when he takes finally, as when he restores. His plans are far-reaching. He would have every one of his children “partake of his holiness,” and one method secures this result in some, which would not avail with others. The widow of Zarephath and the Shunamite “received their dead raised to life again,” and the prophet’s widow had a miracle worked in her behalf, to save her sons from being sold as bondmen, while multitudes around them endured the common lot. The only way of peace for the reflecting mind is to study the character of our God, as he is revealed in Jesus Christ, and then meekly to say,

“ O Lord my God, do thou thy holy will.”

THE SHUNAMITE.

It was a sultry day of summer time.

The sun poured down upon the ripened grain
With quivering heat, and the suspended leaves

Hung motionless. The cattle on the hills
Stood still, and the divided flock were all
Laying their nostrils to the cooling roots,
And the sky looked like silver, and it seemed
As if the air had fainted, and the pulse
Of nature had run down, and ceased to beat.

“ Haste thee, my child ! ” the Syrian mother said,
“ Thy father is athirst ” — and, from the depths
Of the cool well under the leaning tree,
She drew refreshing water, and with thoughts
Of God’s sweet goodness stirring at her heart,
She blessed her beautiful boy, and to his way
Committed him. And he went lightly on,
With his soft hands pressed closely to the cool
Stone vessel, and his little naked feet
Lifted with watchful care ; and o’er the hills,
And through the light green hollows where the lambs
Go for the tender grass, he kept his way,
Wiling its distance with his simple thoughts,
Till, in the wilderness of sheaves, with brows
Throbbing with heat, he set his burden down.

Childhood is restless ever, and the boy
Stayed not within the shadow of the tree,
But with a joyous industry went forth
Into the reapers’ places, and bound up
His tiny sheaves, and plaited cunningly
The pliant withs out of the shining straw —
Cheering their labor on, till they forgot
The heat and weariness of their stooping toil

In the beguiling of his playful mirth.
Presently he was silent, and his eye
Closed as with dizzy pain, and with his hand
Pressed hard upon his forehead, and his breast
Heaving with the suppression of a cry,
He uttered a faint murmur, and fell back
Upon the loosened sheaf, insensible.

They bore him to his mother, and he lay
Upon her knees till noon — and then he died !
She had watched every breath, and kept her hand
Soft on his forehead, and gazed in upon
The dreamy languor of his listless eye,
And she had laid back all his sunny curls,
And kissed his delicate lip, and lifted him
Into her bosom, till her heart grew strong —
His beauty was so unlike death ! She leaned
Over him now, that she might catch the low
Sweet music of his breath, that she had learned
To love when he was slumbering at her side
In his unconscious infancy —

“ — So still !

‘Tis a soft sleep ! How beautiful he lies,
With his fair forehead, and the rosy veins
Playing so freshly in his sunny cheek !
How could they say that he would die ? O God !
I could not lose him ! I have treasured all
His childhood in my heart, and even now,
As he has slept, my memory has been there,
Counting like treasures all his winning ways —
His unforgotten sweetness :

" — Yet so still ! —

How like this breathless slumber is to death !
I could believe that in that bosom now
There were no pulse — it beats so languidly
I cannot see it stir ; but his red lip !
Death would not be so very beautiful !
And that half smile — would death have left *that* there ?
— And should I not have felt that he would die ?
And have I not wept over him ? — and prayed
Morning and night for him ? And *could* he die ?
— No — God will keep him ! He will be my pride
Many long years to come, and his fair hair
Will darken like his father's, and his eye
Be of a deeper blue when he is grown ;
And he will be so tall, and I shall look
With such a pride upon him ! — *He to die !*"
And the fond mother lifted his soft curls,
And smiled, as if 't were mockery to think
That such fair things could perish —

— Suddenly

Her hand shrunk from him, and the color fled
From her fixed lip, and her supporting knees
Were shook beneath her child. Her hand had touched
His forehead, as she dallied with his hair —
And it was cold — like clay ! Slow, very slow,
Came the misgiving that her child was dead.
She sat a moment, and her eyes were closed
In a dumb prayer for strength, and then she took
His little hand and pressed it earnestly —
And put her lip to his — and looked again
Fearfully on him — and, then bending low,

She whispered in his ear, " My son ! — my son ! "

And as the echo died, and not a sound
Broke on the stillness, and he lay there still—
Motionless on her knee — the truth *would* come !
And with a sharp, quick cry, as if her heart
Were crushed, she lifted him and held him close
Into her bosom — with a mother's thought —
As if Death had no power to touch him there !

* * * * *

The man of God came forth, and led the child
Unto his mother, and went on his way
And he was there — her beautiful — her own —
Living and smiling on her — with his arms
Folded upon her neck, and his warm breath
Breathing upon her lips, and in her ear
The music of his gentle voice once more !

THE MOTHER OF JOB'S CHILDREN.

THE view of a prospered and happy family first presents itself to us, as we open the book of Job. A noble father—an upright man, who “fears God and eschews evil.” One who is revered and honored by all who know him; before whom aged and young alike rise up; in deference to whose wisdom princes refrain from talking, and nobles hold their peace; whom no one sees without bestowing just words of praise; whose voice none hear without uttering a blessing on the speaker. One who befriends the friendless, and is a father to the poor; who is eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; who causes the widow's heart to sing for joy, and is a defender of the injured and forlorn. One whose smile gladdens a whole community, and who sits chief among them, the comforter of all that mourn.

A mother and ten sons and daughters grace the home of this noble patriarch, and are to him

as the light of his eyes. The abundant blessing of Heaven rests upon them. The candle of the Lord lightens their every darkened hour, and the secret of God is in their dwellings. They wash their steps in butter, and the rock pours them out rivers of oil. Wealth, and station, and fair character among men, they have ; the approbation of the Almighty is theirs, and a pure faith sanctifies and hallows all their days.

They live in the most delightful harmony. The father and mother and sisters seem to occupy one home, and the brothers, with wives and families of their own, are settled all around, forming the most charming of all earthly social circles. We feel our hearts glow as we imagine their many sources of joy. The welcome and heartfelt satisfaction of the father and mother, as they come in, one after another, of an evening, each with an incident to contribute to the general conversation — their interests all identified — their hopes and fears, and perplexities and comforts, mutual ; the animation of the sisters, as they prepare, from time to time, for the birthday feasts which the brothers give in their sev-

eral houses, and which they enjoy so much,—spending in each family seven days of uninterrupted hilarity; and the closing gathering, under the paternal roof, when the father and priest sanctifies them all, and pours out his fervent prayers for the pardon of their sins—remembering even the possible transgression of their thoughts—and then sends them forth again with his blessing and love. It would be difficult to picture a more complete scene of earthly happiness.

Earthly happiness! There is insecurity and instability in the very name! Draw out, and embellish, and complete the most perfect ideal of joy, and write under it "*earthly*," it is marred and defaced. This is the alloy which destroys the value of our most precious things. This is the drop which embitters our purest draughts. Heaven were no longer heaven could one thought of change be admitted into it.

" O, ye blest scenes of permanent delight!
Full above measure! lasting beyond bound!
A *perpetuity* of bliss is bliss.
Could you, so rich in rapture, fear an end,

That ghastly thought would drink up all your joy,
And quite unparadise the realms of light."

The fearful wreck of happiness which came upon Job and his wife has become a proverb. In the morning they sat at their table, surrounded with every comfort. No thought of want or care oppressed them. The luxuries of wealth were theirs. Before night they were stripped of all, and unmitigated poverty laid its hand upon them. With the rising sun started up their numerous servants, ready to fulfil with alacrity their slightest command. At nightfall they were forced to perform unwonted services with their own hands, and, though they called, there were none to do their bidding. Ten loving sons and daughters surrounded them when they woke, full of life and joy — their pride and blessing ; before the hour of rest returned they were "written childless." They had many friends ; at least, so they thought when it was summer with them. Winter, desolate, dreary winter, had suddenly arrived, and these seeming friends had sought a kindlier clime. Was this all ? Surely it was enough. But no ; a more terrible trial awaits them. Hith-

erto they have stood together, and in mutual sorrow have been mutual helpers. Now commences a process which shall drain their last drop of peace — a weaning, an estranging process. Foul disease fastens on the father's body, and a more distressing ailment possesses itself of the mother's spirit. Faith and patience fail her, and where was love before, seems now to be only gall and wormwood.

There have been those who have utterly condemned this mother, and she has been a by-word and her name a scandal. Some have concluded, because so little is said of her, that she was wholly abandoned and wicked, and had been always such. They even shut her out from repentance, and seem not to dream of the possibility of reform. They consign her to death, and consider it no additional calamity, and thus allow her no share in her husband's returning prosperity. For all this we find no warrant. That she had been a good woman, and a help-meet and friend to her husband, we feel sure, from his surprise at her evil advice in the hour of their calamity. "Thou art not like thyself."

"Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh."

Job is called the most patient of men. Yet Job forgot himself, and spoke foolishly, and reproached the Almighty. Shall his wife, who had a part in all his griefs, and on whom the stroke fell more heavily, since she had a mother's heart — shall she be wholly condemned ? If Job endured with a fortitude so remarkable as to be considered its embodiment through all time, shall his wife's name be cast out as vile, because she is only like common mortals ?

It seems to us far more rational, and in accordance with truth, to look upon her as one whose reason and faith were almost annihilated by the awful blow which so suddenly bereaved her ; and who manifested the impatience and rebellion against the dealings of providence, which, if we judge rightly, are very common among men, and not such an anomaly as to distinguish her among millions. And, since the holy record does not hint that Job, with his new possessions, took also a new wife, we love to hope that this afflicted mother, repentant, subdued and chastened, came

forth from the furnace, as did her noble husband, refined and pure, and fitted to enjoy prosperity with a thankful heart, which retained not a vestige of those feelings that once prompted evil and impious words.

Wealth returned ; friends flocked to congratulate ; brothers and sisters, long cold and unkind, were once more loving and true. But the long night did not seem surely dissipated till a daughter came to waken parental joys anew in the hearts long silent and desolate, and to unite and cement in fresh bonds of affection those whom wretchedness had estranged and sundered. They called her Jemima — day !

All that they had been, they again became, and more. Seven sons again clustered round them, “and in all the land were none found so fair” as the three daughters who called them father and mother.

Do any still think hardly of Job's wife, let them place themselves in her lot, and judge if they could endure her trials without a murmuring word or a hard thought ; then lay their hands upon their mouths, and pray earnestly to be spared the test.

ELIZABETH.

WITHIN our hearing, as we commence to write this sketch, are the tones of a fond mother's voice, conversing at the close of the day with her two young sons, of serious and weighty matters. They have retired for the night, and she, choosing the hour when good impressions are easiest made, sits with a hand on each, reminding them of their faults, commanding their good behavior, and exerting the influence which tender affection gives to lead them in paths of virtue and uprightness. The blessing of the Eternal be upon her in her holy work.

What wonderful power has God committed to a mother's hands ! How exalted are her privileges ! who can for a moment set a true estimate upon the worth of her gentle counsels to her boys, who are soon to enter upon life's temptations and duties ? Who can calculate the results of her daily intercourse with her girls, who are

so soon to mould in their turn the plastic and immortal mind ?

There have been some mothers of earth peculiarly favored and blest. It was a privilege to be the mother of Moses, of Elijah, of Samuel. It is a privilege to bring into the world, and train up into life, the intelligent, and industrious, and useful members of society ; but she is most favored to whose arms is given one of those whom Jehovah uses to advance most rapidly his kingdom among men. “ Let my child be an instrument of good to souls, let him live a life of prayer and communion with God, and be devoted to the Redeemer’s cause, and I will ask nothing more,” says the truly Christian mother. “ I will not seek for him earthly honor, nor wealth, nor pleasures. I will not even ask health, nor comfort, nor ease, nor exemption from severe trials. I will not shrink from the knowledge of sufferings which he may be called to endure. If so be my prayer for his sanctification be heard, I will be silent in every other matter, or only say, ‘ Thy will be done.’ ”

The subject of our present study was a mother

thus favored, and she was so blessed as to know, even before his birth, that her child would be only a comfort to her, never a source of sorrow. His character and commission were announced with the tidings of his coming into the world, and as she dwelt in thought upon the strange communication, how must her heart have glowed and exulted at the privilege conferred upon her! Four hundred years before, the last of the prophets had foretold the coming of her son. In the councils of Eternity he holds a most exalted place. He is the day-star which heralds the sun. She is the wife of a priest, and versed in the hopes, and expectations, and prophesyings of her people. In the days of her youth, in common with many of her country-women, she had hoped that possibly she might give birth to this promised child, or at least to his mother. But years passed on, and her hopes had long since faded. She was old, and her husband well stricken in years. Even the wish for sons and daughters had almost died, until brought back to sudden life by the strange words of the angel to Zacharias. Now she begins to feel a mother's yearning toward the

life which she unconsciously nourishes, and a hitherto unknown gladness fills all her soul. Her silent husband pursues his avocations, seeming to her as if he ever pondered on the mysterious visitation in the temple, and felt still the awe with which the presence of Gabriel had first inspired him. They have been always followers of that which is good, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, and now a rich reward is ministered to them from his hand.

The story of John's birth, of the gathering of friends, of the restoration of Zacharias, is one of the most touching and beautiful in the sacred record. But from that time nothing more is said respecting his mother. Whether she lived beyond his childhood we do not know, nor what part she took in the formation of the character which was so excellent as to draw from Jesus the testimony, "Verily, I say unto you, Among them that were born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." We always, though perhaps sometimes involuntarily, gather our ideas of the character of the mother from

what we know of her children ; nor are we often mistaken. We think that the firm, uncompromising integrity of John's character, his fidelity, his humility, stood in most intimate relation to his mother's blameless life. We admire his noble course, and feel sure that were his mother living, it afforded her the satisfaction of a longed-for blessing, toward the attainment of which she had given her earnest efforts. We behold him in prison, regardless of his own privations, not once appealing to the one mightier than himself for succor, but anxious only that the bridegroom should be recognized and honored, while he stands in the shade ; and instinctively we recognize a retiring, humble woman's influence working among the elements of his character. We dwell painfully on his lonely and sudden death, and wonder why he was permitted thus to leave the world without one word of encouragement or sympathy from him whom he so nobly honored ; but we seem to meet Elizabeth's calm reproving eye, and are convinced that he had been early taught to follow his Lord even unto death, and to count life itself

worthless for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

She has gone to her reward, and John worships with her the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. We hope to meet him yet on the heights of Zion, and to know more than we possibly can now of the life they led on earth. How much we have to learn! Eternity itself is not more far-reaching than are the sources of knowledge which it will lay open to us, and from which we thirst, even now, sorely thirst, to be drinking. The dealings of infinite wisdom and grace with each child brought home to glory, how intensely interesting to every other! Would we might so fill every relation of life as to bring only honor to our Redeemer in that day when he shall come to be admired in his saints, and glorified in all them that believe.

MARY.

WHAT was the early history of the mother of Jesus? Who were her parents? Where was her childhood passed, and under what influences? What was her character? Did anything foretell that she would be chosen from all the maidens among her people for the high honor which was afterward conferred upon her? Was she peculiarly amiable or lovely, or devoutly pious and scrupulously exact in her observance of the Jewish ritual? Question after question arises thus in our minds, as we contemplate this most interesting of all the mothers of the earth; but to none can we give a satisfactory reply. For reasons known only to Infinite Wisdom, the veil of obscurity is closely drawn over all that part of her life which is not immediately connected with the life of our Lord. We do not even know her age when she was suddenly visited by the messenger from the upper temple announcing her wonderful destiny. "Hail, thou that art highly

favored ! the Lord is with thee ; blessed art thou among women." Blessed and favored indeed ! From the time that Eve exulted, "I have gotten a man from the Lord," how many hearts had longed and hoped for the high privilege ; and even now, while she sits pondering upon the strange tidings, how many high-born mothers of her nation are looking on their young daughters with earnest desire and hope ; and how many conscientious hearts, looking for the consolation of Israel, are daily studying the prophecies, if possible, to encourage themselves in the expectation for the loved ones whom they have trained with unwonted care for this very end !

Mary sits as if entranced. Has she been dreaming ? No. Gabriel, who stands in the presence of Jehovah, has truly been with her, and spoken to her, and his mysterious words yet linger in her ears. Rapidly her thoughts recall the promises which she has heard from her childhood. She knows that one born of woman is yet to do away the curse which the serpent brought upon the race. The Scriptures have been taught her, and a light now shines upon them unseen

before. She recalls and dwells on every word the angel spoke. In her heart she again murmurs, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word." Day after day multitudes of thoughts come crowding upon her. She feels in herself already the fulfilment of the promise. At last, unable any longer to keep pent up in her own heart the joy-inspiring secret, she arises in haste and seeks the only friend who she feels can fully sympathize with her. What a meeting was that! Elizabeth utters her congratulations, and Mary's long-restrained gladness finds utterance in words most exalted and sublime.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

Well may she speak His praise in lofty tones, who has taken her into more intimate relationship with himself than any other of mortal race. Well may she rejoice in Him, the infinite Jehovah, who has thus condescended to distinguish her above all who have ever lived, or shall live after.

"For he hath regarded the low estate of his

handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

Eighteen hundred years have rolled by, and yet are the words being fulfilled. Mary, most happy of mothers, most blessed of thy race! Exultation becomes thee well. The Magnificat is suited to thy lips. Meet it is that thy triumph song should sound over all the mingling and deafening voices of centuries, and reach even our ears who dwell in these ends of the earth.

"For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name."

Great has ever been the mystery of that incarnation. Even she, who had the witness within herself, that, contrary to all ordinary laws of nature, a new life was springing from her own, could only speak thus in awe and reverence of what she knew was truth, but which she could not for a moment understand.

"He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away."

Royalty coveted this boon, and presumed upon it. Surely the heir of David's throne should come in the nobler branches of David's house. Disappointment waits on many an exalted family. He looked from his heavenly throne upon all grades and classes of men, and chose to make his earthly home with the humble and poor, the uneducated, the inferior. No wonder he was despised and rejected of men. They had not for one moment imagined him other than noble and aristocratic; one born to rule over the lower classes, not to mingle among them as if he were of them. No marvel that "he came unto his own, and his own received him not." How could they recognize in the carpenter's son the Messiah of their hopes—the Prince who was to sit on David's throne? No wonder they looked with contempt on one who thus "exalted those of low degree."

"He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy: as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever."

Sitting in Hebron, where lie the bones of the patriarchs, Mary sings of the fulfilment of promises made two thousand years before. In that

cave of Machpelah, Abraham had been sleeping centuries. He believed, and received a son in his old age, the type of Him who should come after. Mary sits near that cave, and her faith has made her mother of Him whose day Abraham rejoiced and was glad to behold by faith. Though He tarry long, though years by thousands roll by between his promises and their fulfilment, Jehovah suffers not a jot or a tittle of his word to fall to the ground. He remembers his covenant, and will surely help his people.

Three months of delightful intercourse have passed since Mary first entered Elizabeth's house, and she now returns to her own. Alas ! what a world is this, in which sorrow treads quickly on the heels of joy, and clouds obscure the brightest sunbeams. Mary is to be mother of the only Son of God ; but she is herself a mortal, and subject to the woes and trials which wait on our mortal state. She is one of a sinful race, and the pains and penalties and vexations which sin has entailed she cannot escape. She has lived on the mount of joy and rapture — she must now descend into the vale of humiliation. She has

been honored by the Almighty — she must now be dishonored by man. A cup of pure joy and triumph has been given to her lips — it must be dashed away, and wormwood must supply its place.

She returns to her home, and pursues her usual avocations with cheerful heart. But soon suspicious glances are cast upon her, and malignant whisperings are heard, and the friends who once were kind avoid her, and a chill begins to creep over her guileless heart. For the first time she realizes how questionable is her position now among her companions. She sees with trembling spirit the storm which threatens her. She looks anxiously upon the face of the one who is more to her than all others, as if to read his heart, and see if he also distrusts her. Why should he not? Is there not cause? Now also her spirit faints, remembering the fearful ordeal to which she may be subjected. What sustained thee in that hour, sad heart? Even He who had brought the fierce trial upon thee. It was not long. There came a day when the eyes most dear, and which had been dimmed by grief and doubt, again met thine

with clear and sympathizing gaze, and arms of love and protection were folded about thee, and the sacred name of wife bestowed upon thee, and in the sanctuary of a husband's home, cherished and revered, thou didst look up once more, and await the future, calm, trustful and happy.

* * * * *

The eventful night arrived which made Mary the mother of the Son of God. Here, again, how many questions a reverent curiosity would ask. Did the curse rest with full force on her who bore that spotless one ? Was he ushered into life with the same agonies which accompany the degenerate children of Adam's race ? We doubt it not. Even for this he assumed our humanity, that he might be made in all respects like his brethren. An infant's woes and weaknesses, childhood's vexations, youth's temptations, manhood's trials. He omitted none.

That birth-night ! One of our own poets has celebrated it in words we cannot forbear to quote at length :

LONGFELLOW'S CHRISTMAS HYMN.

It was the calm and silent night !
Seven hundred years and fifty-three
Had Rome been growing up to might,
And now was queen of land and sea !
No sound was heard of clashing wars ;
Peace brooded o'er the hushed domain ;
Apollo, Pallas, Jove, and Mars,
Held undisturbed their ancient reign,
In the solemn midnight,
Centuries ago !

'T was in the calm and silent night !
The Senator of haughty Rome
Impatient urged his chariot's flight,
From lordly revel rolling home ;
Triumphant arches, gleaming, swell
His breast with thoughts of boundless sway ;
What recked the Roman what befell
A paltry province far away,
In the solemn midnight,
Centuries ago !

Within that province far away,
Went plodding home a weary boor ;
A streak of light before him lay,
Fallen through a half-shut stable door,
Across his path. He paused, for naught
Told what was going on within ;
How keen the stars ! his only thought ;
The air how calm, and cold, and thin,

In the solemn midnight,
Centuries ago !

O, strange indifference ! — low and high
Drowsed over common joys and cares ;
The earth was still, but knew not why ;
The world was listening unawares !
How calm a moment may precede
One that shall thrill the world forever !
To that still moment none would heed,
Man's doom was linked no more to sever,
In the solemn midnight,
Centuries ago !

It is the calm and solemn night !
A thousand bells ring out and throw
Their joyous peals abroad, and smite
The darkness — charmed and holy now !
That night that erst no shame had worn,
To it a happy name is given ;
For in that stable lay, new-born,
The peaceful prince of earth and heaven,
In the solemn midnight,
Centuries ago !

What were Mary's emotions on that solemn night, when prince and peasant pursued their accustomed way, and the mysterious infant form which she had nourished beneath her heart was placed in her arms ? How did she feel when the

wonder-stricken shepherds demanded to see her child, and she found her secret had been revealed from above ? And when strange foreign men bent the knee in homage to the babe, and poured into her lap their rich gifts, was it more joy or wonder that thrilled her heart ?

* * * *

We know little, far too little, of the theme which so entrances us ; but there is ever one delightful certainty on which we can dwell. Mary was the only mother of a sinless child our earth has ever seen. Think of it, friends. From the hour of his birth to that in which he was slain, no folly, or wilfulness, or disobedience of his ever caused her a pang, or brought a tear to her eye. He lay in his cradle, not merely an image of innocence, but its embodiment. As she folded him to her breast, no dread of the future, no fear of the effect of evil example, or natural corruption, disturbed her peace. No cry of impatience was ever heard from that baby-mouth ; no burst of passion ever disfigured that sweet childish face. The shuddering which the first deliberate untruth from hitherto unsoiled lips

causes, she never felt. She trusted him implicitly. He sat by her side, he followed her steps, he grew silently up, all that a mother's heart could wish. He received her instructions, and obeyed her commands, in the spirit of love and filial piety. She saw him tried by poverty and reproaches. She knew his high origin, and looked often wonderingly on him as in his meekness he received taunts in silence.

Never once had she occasion to reprove him ; and the bitterness which the parental heart feels when needed chastisement must be inflicted on its precious ones, she knew it not. O, what a love was that which grew day by day for thirty years between that mother and son, before his work claimed him, and he left her side to buffet the world's scorn, and be baptized with the baptism for which he came ! Whatever may have been her experience with her other children, her satisfaction in her first-born son was unalloyed.

Mary ! Hail ! Thou that art highly favored !
Blessed indeed art thou !

* * * * *

Mary was present when Jesus first manifested

his miraculous power in Cana, and again, at Capernaum; while he was preaching earnestly to the people, she sought admittance to his presence. How much she saw of him during his three years' ministry we do not know; but she was with him when he went his last journey to Jerusalem, and was among those who stood by the cross during his agony. Where was Joseph? Where were her other sons? It would seem that, as he hung on that cross, he felt that he was his mother's sole dependence, since the only words recorded, which relate to aught but himself, were those touching ones which gave her to the care of his most trusted disciple and friend. What a remembrance to carry in her heart, while she endured the keen inflictions of the sword which Simeon had prophesied for her, were those last words! With the weight of a world's sins upon his soul, and amid the pangs of tortured nature, he was yet true to the love which had been her solace so many years. To the last he was faithful, and there was no disappointment in his character, whatever there might be in his circumstances. Did she see him again after that long,

lingering look, at the place “where his body was laid” ? It is not said ; but she was among those who companied together after his ascension, and we cannot doubt, was present when his “ Peace be with you ! ” sent a thrill of joy to so many hearts.

They are both, now, the mysterious Son and his favored mother, in that world where the relations of time are dissolved ; where naught is valued of earth, save that which aided in bringing the ransomed soul to its eternal home. We cannot possibly know in what light Mary is there regarded, nor what is the nature of the bond which unites her to Jesus. He was her Saviour, as he is ours, and she rejoices in the redemption he wrought out, as we all shall when we too see him face to face, and come into his presence to go no more out forever.

Mothers, let us ever bear in mind, as among our most effective instruments, the example of Mary’s child. Little ears are never more attentive, little eyes are never more wondering, than when they hear of him who never grieved his mother—who was never disobedient, never angry,

never untruthful. No motive appeals so powerfully as the desire to be like him. "Jesus would not have done so." "Then, mother, I will not do it again; I want to be like Jesus," is, in some houses, an almost daily reproof and answer. To be like Jesus! It is the fervent aspiration of the advanced Christian. How sweet to hear its expression from infant lips, and how earnest the hope that it may come to be the habitual desire of the soul!

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

“Who went about doing good.” How little do we comprehend the meaning of the words as applied to him, before whose coming footsteps pain and suffering, and every form of earthly woe, vanished, and who left evermore behind him health, and vigor, and joy! Some vague impression we gather as we read of his “wonderful works,” but we do not comprehend the full import. We do not understand that it was as if a being from the upper sanctuary should visit our own town, and all the sick and suffering—the lame, the blind, the feeble of our own acquaintance—should suddenly, by his all-powerful word, be “healed of their infirmities,” and we should see them going forth among living, acting men, as unconscious of sorrow as if they had never known its withering touch. There rose a morning on some of the villages of Palestine, which saw only the healthy and the glad within their walls, for—he had “healed their sick.” How

great the change should to-morrow's sun behold such a sight in our town!

Methinks I see it thus: from yonder house comes daily past my door, led by gentle hands, a blind father. In the midst of his days an inscrutable providence has shut from his view all beautiful and gladsome things. On the fair forms of wife and daughters he has been unable to gaze these many years; and one prattling boy often follows his footsteps, on whose loving, wondering, up-turned face he has never looked. Yesterday I saw him, with uncertain step, following in the train of that stranger whose name is on every lip. Can words describe the change which has passed on him since? He is not at all this morning what he was then. With firm, manly, joyous tread, he crosses the threshold of his home, and meets the glad group who have watched and cared for him so long. He is no longer blind, dependent, helpless. Once more he can bear his part in maintaining his family,—once more he is a man among men. What a weary weight of woe is suddenly lifted from the heart of that loving wife and mother! She has

not murmured under it. Cheerfully has she borne up — nobly has she performed her part, and far above price has her love proved itself in this deep trial ; but now, what joy beyond expression is hers ! — what blessings has the power of the Healer sent under that roof !

In the opposite house lives a little girl, crippled from her infancy. The heart of fond parents is wrung daily as her halting step is heard about the house, and forebodingly they look into the future, and dread the sorrows it may bring to their gentle one. She has met Jesus in the way, this morning, and his compassionate eye and voice have, in a moment, set her free ; and now, behold ! was ever exultation like hers as she skips and jumps, and runs to tell her mother what has been done for her ? Imagine, also, if you can, the joy of that mother's heart — the gratitude of that rejoicing family !

In another home dwells one of pale, sorrowful countenance, on which consumption has stamped his terrible lineaments. Young, happy, surrounded with friends, but about to leave them all — fading from her husband's sight, day by

day, as silently, but surely, as the snow-wreath before the sun — leaving, with such anguish in her heart as dying mothers alone can know, her precious, only child to breast, unaided, the world's cold waves. A short time since I saw her thus, and wept that earth should furnish such a sight. But the Deliverer has been under her roof — the bloom has suddenly returned to her cheek, and the disappointed destroyer has unloosed his grasp. She steps lightly and joyously about her household work — she smiles on her glad husband, strains, with fervent joy, her little one to her heart, and tears of gratitude fall from her eyes as she thinks of him who has restored her to life and hope once more.

* * * * *

Our Lord healed, probably, every kind of disease known in Palestine. He had raised the dying from the beds they had not hoped to leave again. But he had not yet raised the dead. This, alone, was wanting to complete the evidences of divine power which his miracles offered. He walks, with his disciples, from Capernaum towards Nain, and as they approach the town

they meet a funeral procession. No spectacle of sorrow presented itself to his view and was disregarded. He sees in a moment what deep grief is here; — a young man is borne to his burial, and by his side walks his lonely, widowed mother. The lamp of hope and joy is for her extinct. She had fondly hoped this one would have sustained her age, and there he lies in death. How can she live without him? He was her only cradle joy, — there is none left to call her mother. She cannot, cannot spare him! Yet death is inexorable. None can burst his iron bands. She has closed his young eyes forever; she must return to her home without him.

Not so, poor mourner. He, who reads the heart and knows all thy distress, has a balm for thee of which thou little dreamest. He, the Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief, possesses one source of joy unknown to common mortals — the power to cure the woes of others. He, who is said to have never smiled, makes it his daily business to call smiles to the woe-begone faces that follow his steps. He, who bears the burden of a world's cares and sins, is found con-

stantly lightening the cares and forgiving the sins of the forlorn and guilty. What peace — what serene satisfaction must be his, as he witnesses the sudden reversion of feeling in that widowed breast ! for HE can look upon the heart and see unveiled those emotions which are all too mighty for outward expression. What a balm to his own woes must he have in this blessed power to heal the manifold woes of those around him !

The young man sat up and began to speak, and they delivered him to his mother. Jesus and his disciples went on their way. His own trial-hour followed shortly ; but, though still possessing the power which had raised the dead — though able to refuse the cup which he had voluntarily taken — though able at any moment to cut short the agonies of crucifixion, and come down from the cross, he endured unto the end ; endured for our sakes, that he might win the power to heal not merely physical, but spiritual maladies ; that he might gain the right to raise from eternal death, and bestow on sinners immortal life. O, would we had power to convey, by any means, to the mothers who will read these pages, our

own deep sense of his presence with his tempest-tost children now, as truly as in the days of his flesh, and of his benignant, almighty love ! It is easy to say, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and forever.” It is easy to quote all that has been written conveying the same idea ; but to realize, and practically believe, and constantly to act upon, and be daily consoled by this truth, is not so often attained unto. Yet, if we will cherish this faith, it will increase, until our peace shall be like a river, and our consolation as the waves of the sea.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

The Roman sentinel stood helmed and tall
Beside the gate of Nain. The busy tread
Of comers to the city mart was done,
For it was almost noon, and a dead heat
Quivered upon the fine and sleeping dust,
And the cold snake crept panting from the wall,
And basked his scaly circles in the sun.

Upon his spear the soldier leaned, and kept
His idle watch, and, as his drowsy dream
Was broken by the solitary foot
Of some poor mendicant, he raised his head
To curse him for a tributary Jew,
And slumberously dozed on.

'T was now high noon.

The dull, low murmur of a funeral
Went through the city — the sad sound of feet
Unmixed with voices — and the sentinel
Shook off his slumber, and gazed earnestly
Up the wide streets, along whose paved way
The silent throng crept slowly. They came on,
Bearing a body heavily on its bier,
And by the crowd that in the burning sun
Walked with forgetful sadness, 't was of one
Mourned with uncommon sorrow. The broad gate
Swung on its hinges, and the Roman bent
His spear-point downwards as the bearers passed,
Bending beneath their burden. There was one —
Only one mourner. Close behind the bier,
Crumpling the pall up in her withered hands,
Followed an aged woman. Her short steps
Faltered with weakness, and a broken moan
Fell from her lips, thickened convulsively
As her heart bled afresh. The pitying crowd
Followed apart, but no one spoke to her.
She had no kinsmen. She had lived alone —
A widow with one son. He was her all —
The only tie she had in the wide world —
And he was dead. They could not comfort her.

Jesus drew near to Nain as from the gate
The funeral came forth. His lips were pale
With the noon's sultry heat. The beaded sweat
Stood thickly on his brow, and on the worn
And simple latchets of his sandals lay,

Thick, the white dust of travel. He had come
Since sunrise from Capernaum, staying not
To wet his lips by green Bethsaida's pool,
Nor wash his feet in Kishon's silver springs,
Nor turn him southward upon Tabor's side
To catch Gilboa's light and spicy breeze.
Genesareth stood cool upon the east,
Fast by the sea of Galilee, and there
The weary traveller might bide till eve ;
And on the alders of Bethulia's plains
The grapes of Palestine hung ripe and wild ;
Yet turned he not aside, but, gazing on,
From every swelling mount, he saw afar,
Amid the hills, the humble spires of Nain,
The place of his next errand ; and the path
Touched not Bethulia, and a league away
Upon the east lay pleasant Galilee.

Forth from the city-gate the pitying crowd
Followed the stricken mourner. They came near
The place of burial, and, with straining hands,
Closer upon her breast she clasped the pall,
And with a gasping sob, quick as a child's,
And an inquiring wildness flashing through
The thin gray lashes of her fevered eyes,
She came where Jesus stood beside the way.
He looked upon her and his heart was moved.
“ Weep not ! ” he said ; and as they stayed the bier,
And at his bidding laid it at his feet,
He gently drew the pall from out her grasp,
And laid it back in silence from the dead.

With troubled wonder the mute throng drew near,
And gazed on his calm looks. A minute's space
He stood and prayed. Then, taking the cold hand,
He said, "Arise!" And instantly the breast
Heaved in its cerements, and a sudden flush
Ran through the lines of the divided lips,
And with a murmur of his mother's name,
He trembled and sat upright in his shroud.
And, while the mourner hung upon his neck,
Jesus went calmly on his way to Nain.

THE SYROPHENICIAN MOTHER.

THE time for the third passover since our Lord commenced his ministry had arrived. He was expected in Jerusalem; but he went not up. He knew what was in store for him. “The ruling Jewish authorities there had definitely concluded to take advantage of his expected visit at this passover, to accomplish his destruction; and, as Jesus saw that absence presented the only *natural* means of prolonging his ministry to its due period, he postponed the lesser to the greater obligation.”

Nor did he even feel safe in Galilee; for the fate of John might follow too earnest a scrutiny of his proceedings on the part of Herod and his evil-minded partner, who saw in him one risen from the dead—an object of “remorseless hate and secret dread.” He avoided observation, therefore; and finally retired entirely, from Herod’s dominions, to those of his brother, “the lawful husband of Herodias, who is universally

described as a mild, well-meaning and righteous prince."

We find him wandering as far as Tyre and Sidon, taking up his abode there, in the hope of escaping observation. How many thoughts—sad thoughts—must have crowded on his mind as he gazed on the ruins everywhere presented to his eye! This was that Tyre which once sat a queen among cities; which, in her pride, had said, "I am of perfect beauty;" whose merchants dealt in "emeralds, and purple, and broidered work, and fine linen, and coral, and agate, and pearls;" of which "the ships of Tarshish did sing in the market;" which was "glorious in the midst of the seas." How fallen now! The noise of her songs hushed forever! the sound of her harps heard no more! Her walls broken down! her pleasant houses destroyed! her stones, and timber, and dust, carried into the midst of the waters! No vestige of her former magnificence remained. A miserable collection of huts was her representative. Among these ruins Jesus walked, wishing, for a time, to be hidden and unknown.

But this could not be. Multitudes from this region had attended on his preaching, had heard his sermon on the mount, and been witnesses of his mighty works. He was recognized; and it was soon whispered round that he, to whose gracious words they had listened with delight, was come among them. The tidings reached the ears of an afflicted mother, who had seen some of his healing miracles, or heard of them through her friends. She waited not for counsel, nor stopped to consider what obstacles might prevent the fulfilment of her wishes. She sought the house where he abode. She hesitated not; but instantly, and without invitation, presented herself before him. His disciples, burning with the hatred which every Jew cherished toward the Gentiles, were indignant that she should dare come to him, and regarded her with undisguised malignity. She heeded them not. Their angry countenances could not deter her. Casting herself upon the ground before him, in the deepest humility, with agonizing earnestness she cries, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David! My daughter is grievously vexed with a

devil." It was the cry of suffering to him whose mercies fail not; but it seemed to fall on deaf ears. "He answered her not a word." How strange! How unlike him who went about doing good, who seemed always to delight in dispensing the blessings of healing and strength to all that came to him! For the first time, he is regardless of the cry of distressed humanity.

The disciples are gratified to see this heathen woman so slighted; but they are not satisfied. "Send her away!" they beg. They wish to have her rebuked as well as slighted; and Jesus *seems* to approve their spirit, for he replies to her renewed entreaties, "I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Can it be true? Have her hopes been raised in vain? Is he, who has seemed so benevolent, so far above human prejudices, so sympathizing and tender-hearted,—is he indeed governed by the narrow views of those who deem themselves the only favorites of Heaven, and cast out all others as unclean? It cannot be. She cannot believe it. She draws still nearer, and prostrates herself still lower, and, in accents which mingle the most

earnest faith with deepest distress, entreats, “Lord, help me.” Coldly and sternly, apparently all unmoved, he answers, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and cast it to dogs.”

The disciples are now happy. She has heard the truth for once ; she will go now, and they will be troubled no more by these Sidonians ; and they exult as if a great victory had been gained. How does she feel, that afflicted mother ? We look to see her rise suddenly, with flushed face and haughty mien, and, walking quickly away, wounded pride and anger overcoming all thought of the errand on which she came. Will she be called a dog ? Will she endure to be told that the Creator regards her so far beneath those who walk the same earth and breathe the same air as herself ? This same Jesus has not hesitated, before this, to lay his hand on the loathsome leper, and to heal the most degraded among his own people, — will she bear to be told that her precious child is beneath his notice, and must perish like a beast, and be regarded as such ? Will she take meekly the sneering triumph of those hard-hearted men ?

No ; she has trusted, and prayed, and been disregarded. Worse than this ; she has been taunted, and her best affections trampled on. She will return to her daughter, and in silence and despair endure as best she may.

Thus *we* judge. Thus we think *we* should do. But she possesses a faith and a humility far beyond our conception. We are wholly wrong. No resentment kindles in her eye. No anger flushes her cheek. No sharpness is in her tone. Accepting instantly the place assigned her, and laying no claim to any privileges beyond, she even gathers hope from what seems to us so irritating and harsh, and instantly answers, meekly and trustingly, “Truth, Lord ; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.”

His end is answered. He had read her heart, and knew what love and faith were there, and he has brought them forth. His assumed sternness is laid aside, and from the depths of his loving heart he answers, “O woman, great is thy faith ! be it unto thee even as thou wilt.”

Study this scene, ye faithless parents ! Pon-

der it deeply, until you imbibe its spirit, until you feel its power. Jesus is evermore the same ; *such* humility, *such* faith will always prevail with him.

Dwell upon this narrative, also, ye bigoted followers of him who was meek and lowly, and behold how he distinguishes the character of his own children under every guise, and learn to judge cautiously. He may love with an infinite love, those whom ye scorn.

THE GRANDMOTHER AND MOTHER OF TIMOTHY.

THE types and shadows have passed away. The Antitype has appeared and accomplished his earthly work, and ascended his mediatorial throne. The old dispensation has given place to the simpler rites of the new. Faith is substituted for the deeds of the law, and, in place of peculiar privileges granted to a few, universal love and good-will are proclaimed to all mankind. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,” was the last command of their Lord, and his disciples are already working zealously for its fulfilment. They are to publish the good tidings first to the Jews in every place, and then to the Gentiles, for he will have all men come to the knowledge of the truth. Paul and Barnabas have set out on their first missionary tour, and the promised Spirit accompanies and crowns their labors.



In the small town of Lystra, not far from Iconium, dwelt, in the days of the apostles, a family in whom we find ourselves extremely interested. The father was a Greek; the mother a Jewess. They had one son; a boy, not of robust health and strong constitution, but subject to many infirmities; yet of so amiable a disposition, and such excellence of character, as to win the esteem and love of all who knew him.

So far as we can ascertain, there was no synagogue in Lystra, most of the inhabitants being worshippers of Jupiter. This family was, consequently, deprived of the privilege of public worship, and the boy grew up, not only without the hallowing influences of the sanctuary, but in an atmosphere quite adverse to the spirit of true godliness, and surrounded with degrading and debasing examples. But he was not left without religious culture. His grandmother—who also lived with them—and his mother, were his instructors in the sacred lore of their people. Although far from their native land, and deprived of sympathy and companionship, and surrounded by idolaters, these devoted women never forgot

their God, nor departed from their faith. Nor did they neglect the duty enjoined on all Jewish parents by the express command of Jehovah.

“ And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart :

“ And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

Whether they had in their possession a copy of the books of Moses, and of the prophets, and of the psalms, or whether they spoke only from remembrance of what had been taught them in their childhood, we do not know ; but it is certain that this child of their love was thoroughly instructed in all these scriptures. From the story of the creation on through all the scenes of Jewish history, nothing was omitted which could interest or benefit their pupil. The sublime prophesyings of Isaiah — the mournful lament of Jeremiah — the example of Daniel and his companions — the sweet strains of the psalmist — all were familiar to him from his earliest years. But

especially was he instructed with regard to His coming who was to redeem Israel. The great prophet of whom Moses spoke — who was shadowed forth in every mysterious rite and sacrifice of their religion — who was the theme of poet and sage ; and the object of faith to every son and daughter of Abraham.

Thus was young Timothy, by his knowledge of holy truth, kept from contamination, and preserved in uprightness, and prepared to become a laborious and faithful preacher of righteousness, and an example to youth, for all coming time.

* * * * *

In their journeyings, Paul and Barnabas have reached Lystra. They find, as we have said, no synagogue there, and, consequently, are compelled to deliver their message wherever they can find a suitable place, and the inhabitants at large flock to hear them. Walking one day through the streets, followed, it may be, by a crowd, Paul sees, sitting by the way-side, a cripple, impotent from his mother's womb, who has never walked. Filled with the sympathy which his Master felt before him, and seeing the man

interested, he speaks with a loud voice, and says, "Stand upright on thy feet." Receiving instantly strength from above, the poor sufferer joyfully obeys, and is seen leaping and walking in the delight of new-found faculties. The multitudes look on with astonishment, and soon the cry is heard, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." Barnabas they call Jupiter, and Paul, Mercurius; and immediately preparations are made to do them homage. This is soon prevented by Paul, who tells them of the only living and true God, and persuades them to desist. Soon after this, certain evil-minded Jews appear from Antioch and Iconium, who work upon the fickle people of Lystra, until they drag him whom they would have worshipped out of the city, and stone him, and leave him, as they suppose, dead. Around his bruised body stand many who have heard the Gospel from his lips, and among them young Timothy. On his heart, so well prepared, the story of Jesus has had its full effect. For the first time the Scriptures, in which he is so well versed, appear perfectly clear to his mind. A new light shines upon them,

He embraces the crucified Messiah in unfeigned faith, and becomes a most useful helper to Paul — who, as we know, revived, and returned to his work — and his dearly beloved son in the Gospel.

A recent missionary traveller thus speaks of his feelings on approaching what he supposed to be the site of Lystra.

"Full of the impression that we were now near the *birth-place of Timothy*, we bent our course more westerly, through a narrow, but fertile and most lovely ravine. The pebbly brook, which gave fertility to the vale, was overhung by trees of a larger growth — walnut, poplar, and so on — than we had been accustomed to see on our journey. Vineyards, gardens, and small orchards of fruit-trees were planted in convenient nooks by the way. A rich fragrance was exhaled from the wild flowers that besprinkled the ground, and only the murmuring of the brook and the music of here and there a feathered songster interrupted the stillness which prevailed. Along these quiet paths, I said within myself, oft trod that beloved youthful disciple, Timothy! Beneath such shades he repeated,

perhaps, the songs of Israel, before he learned from the apostle Paul of the name of Jesus. Perhaps he was inured to hardship by labor in these very fields; or, more probably, he may have passed to and from Iconium with burdens of wood and returns of merchandise, as those who dwell here now do. Precious saint! thy memory breathes a richer perfume than the flowers of thy native vales. Through the long tract of ages, thy early knowledge of the holy scriptures, thy rigid temperance, thy early wisdom, thy youthful piety, thy useful labors, thy name of good report, thy apostolic ministry, have come down, with refreshing and stimulating influence, to the youth of our own and of all coming times. And, ye excellent and revered ‘mother Eunice and grandmother Lois,’ so honorably mentioned by an apostle, your example shall live while the sun and moon endure, as an encouragement to timely and faithful parental instruction.”

It seems fitting that we should close our work with this delightful illustration of the results of

maternal faithfulness, in early imbuing the heart of childhood with the truths of the Bible. Sow thickly the good seed of the word, and water it abundantly. It shall surely bring forth fruit in which you will rejoice. It is God himself who has commanded it, and he is all-wise and knows the best means to any sought-for end. He, moreover, has promised "My word shall not return unto me void." May his blessing rest upon all endeavors to make it more interesting and precious to his children, and upon all their labors among the objects of their love and care.

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

RECD TO JAIL 16 '90 14 DAY

OCT 27 1990

1/15/02

REC'D C.L. DEC 06 '01

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 033 276 7

Univers
Soc
I



REBECCA.